

**DEVELOPING FREEDOM: BEHAVIOURAL AND SOCIAL FREEDOMS
FOR CHILDREN VIA MOBILE PHONES AND INTERNET DEVICES**

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Abstract

Middle years children (7 - 12 years) engaging with mobile phones has become a very normal part of their behaviour in recent years. It is an important issue for psychologists to explore in relation to learning about children's development and behaviour currently. The internet is part of the mobile phone, so one cannot be explored without looking at the other. Much of the evidence that exists has explored children's use of the internet, but there is less evidence available about children using mobile phones. Only recently has evidence started to emerge. Questions were devised for this research project asking children (7 – 12 years) about the meaning of mobile phones / internet devices, as well as investigating children's use of these devices on the parenting role. A qualitative research approach was taken in order to investigate children's views and parents' views, so that in-depth knowledge could be gained. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on social development was incorporated as the underpinning theory for this research, to assist in understanding children's social development in different social settings. Critical realism (Maxwell, 2012) was selected as the epistemological approach as it allowed participants' realities to be considered closely alongside established knowledge. As children's use of the mobile phone is a new behaviour for them, established knowledge and views from the field of young people's use of mobile phones was included but separately; allowing children's realities to be considered and compared within a wider social context. A triangulated research design was thus adopted; comparing the views of these different groups of participants (children, parents and young people). Focus group interviews were undertaken with all participants, along with individual interviews for children. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) was applied to analyze all participants' views. Three main themes emerged:

1. *Appropriate communications*, where children's views about communicating appropriately on their devices were revealed;
2. *Freedom*, highlighting freedom as an emerging concept for children, where mobile phones particularly played an important role in creating opportunities for children to develop freedom both

behaviourally and socially; 3. *Time*, the final theme shows how parents were thinking about children's use of these devices across time, as a way of understanding their social development. It was revealed that the mobile phone was used as a resource within the parenting role, helping parents to manage children's behaviour. These themes together form a framework for exploring children's use of mobile / internet devices. The research also explored some of the social processes underlying interactions between children and parents around children's devices. It included the unique nature of this cohort of children as early users of mobile phones, as well as parents' concerns about their children's use of them. In conclusion this research project, by exploring children's realities alongside those of young people and parents, has helped to develop an understanding about children's behaviour in a contemporary context through their use of mobile / internet devices, for one group of children. It has also demonstrated how freedom can emerge for children within different social settings (Bronfenbrenner's settings, 1979). Further research will need to be undertaken with middle years children to see if similar findings are revealed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Middle years children, those children between 7 - 12 years, live in a very different world from the one their parents and grandparents inhabited as children. They live in a world inspired by communication technologies – mobile phones and internet devices. These devices have become very much part of children's everyday experience. They influence the way children interact with each other, similar to the way they have influenced young people's interactions before them (Singh, Blanchard, Hartup & Burns, 2013). Further, these devices consume much of children's leisure time (Rosen, 2011; Ofcom, 2013). Children enjoy the modern day communication experience. Some are skilled users of these devices and are even able to multi-task; watch any child's face as they surf the internet, text friends and engage in a computer game, sometimes simultaneously. Children love their devices and view them as part of what they do.

As a trainee research psychologist I wanted to undertake research with middle years children (7 – 12 years) exploring their use of mobile and internet devices. I wanted to know how children used them and what they meant to children in their lives, as a way of understanding their social development from a contemporary perspective. I was particularly interested in investigating what could be revealed about children's behaviours, particularly their communication skills, as at the time (2009) children's use of mobile phones was becoming an exciting new phase in their development. One which might be able to tell psychologists something original about their behaviour. An important way to undertake such research would be to discuss with children themselves to find out their thoughts.

The thesis explains how this research was undertaken and its findings, following my discussions with middle years children and their parents about children's use of mobile and internet devices. Initially, this first chapter presents a context for

the research, highlighting my purpose in undertaking it and some initial thoughts on its potential future.

1.1 Defining key terms

The key terms used within this thesis are outlined below.

- The focus is on *middle childhood*; the period from 7 - 12 years. These children are referred to as *middle years children*.
- Children's mobile phones, the different mobile / internet devices they use for games and music, as well as the internet itself, will be referred to as *mobile / internet devices*. These are all types of communication technology which children currently use.
- The term *parent* refers to parents and carers, which may also include grandparents and foster-carers. Sometimes the term *mother* or *father* is used specifically, where relevant.
- *Young people*, who also feature within the research, are those individuals between 13 - 21 years, with *young adults* considered as individuals over 21 years.
- *Social development* refers to children communicating with others, along with the behaviours and emotions that arise from these interactions.

1.1.1 The cohort – middle years children

A cohort of children (7 – 12 years) were selected to participate within the research. These children were selected because they represent their age group at this time, and could provide important insights. This cohort are special as they

are the first of their generation to use mobile phones and other mobile devices which access the internet. This cohort are referred to as *early or young users* of mobile / internet devices. Little is known exclusively about this age group and their use of these devices, which is why they were selected. There have been other children before them, in relation to other age groups and different devices, which were once considered as special too. As Prout (2000) maintains this is all part of the changing evolution of both childhood and society, which use of different communication technologies contribute.

How children are discussed in the thesis is outlined. Middle years children will be referred to as *children*. When making reference to those younger than 7 years, they will be referred to as *young children*. Those of 13 years and above will be referred to as *young people*. Not everyone refers to children and young people in this way; they do not make this same distinction within childhood as the thesis does. Researchers often refer to all age groups within childhood as children (see Livingstone, Haddon & Görzig, 2012). Sometimes researchers do make the distinction between children and young people, but can misuse the terms (see Bond, 2010). There are other researchers within the field who do make the same distinction as the thesis does (see Ling & Helmersen, 2000).

Within my own fields of practice, children's / young people's nursing and child psychology, a distinction is made between children and young people, which is why the thesis has adopted this approach. Children of 12 years and younger are referred to as children, whilst those of 13 years and above are referred to as young people (Children's & Young People's Nursing, Nursing and Midwifery Council, [NMC]; Children, Young People & Families group, British Psychological Society, [BPS]). This distinction indicates a shift in childhood; a change in dependence on parents, with growing independence as the child becomes older and is recognised as a young person.

1.2 Research context

Over the last few years the increase in children's use of mobile / internet devices has surprised many people. Livingstone (2009), Livingstone and Brake (2010) talked about this rapid rise in use amongst children, and remarked how even Governments had been amazed; children emailing, texting and social networking enthusiastically. With such a rapid increase in use, over a relatively short period it seemed, there was a need certainly from the perspective of psychology, to know more. Therefore it felt appropriate to be undertaking research in 2009 to find out about children accessing these devices, to find out what impact, if any, it was having on their development. This research has now been completed. It has taken several years to complete, being a part-time endeavour. During this time there have been a number of changes, both in relation to research within the field and how children use their mobile / internet devices based upon the design.

When the research first began there seemed to be very few United Kingdom (UK) psychology studies on children's mobile phone use. There were studies on children's internet use however, which increased during 2008 / 2009 onwards, most significantly through the work of Tanya Byron and Sonia Livingstone. In addition, it was not commonplace at this time for the two technologies to be accessible via one device. However, by 2010 some children were accessing the internet via their mobile phones (UK Council Child Internet Safety, [UKCCIS], 2011). There were international studies on children's mobile phone use, such as Oksman's and Turtiainen's (2004) Finnish study. The lack of UK psychological evidence was originally highlighted by Charlton, Panting and Hannan (2002), who wrote the first UK psychology paper on this subject. Five years later Haddon (2007) further reiterated the need for research on children's mobile phone use in the UK.

More recently, psychological research has emerged. Ofcom, who produce yearly reports on children's / young people's social media use, have recently started to include children's mobile phone use in-depth, within their reports (Ofcom, 2011 - 2015). Further, following on from the *EU Kids Online project* (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson, 2009 - 2011; Livingstone et al., 2012) children's / young people's use of mobile phones have been explored through the *Net Children go Mobile project* (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2013, 2014; O'Neill & Dinh, 2014; Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015). In 2009 there was a need to explore children's mobile phone use; their thoughts and behaviours, as a lack of understanding existed.

In comparison to the mobile phone, psychological studies in the UK on children's internet use had received more attention. In part because the internet has been available for longer than the mobile phone. The internet became extensively available during the 1990s (Chatfield, 2012). Children embraced it through use at school and at home, supported by both teachers and parents. Children have been using the internet for some time, whereas although the mobile phone had been around since the late 1990s, it was only becoming evident from 2007 onwards that it was developing as an important communication technology within the lives of UK middle years children (see Haddon, 2007). Hence few studies were evident in the UK before this time.

Extensive research has been undertaken on the internet by the social psychologist Sonia Livingstone and her colleagues (Livingstone & Bovill, 1999, Livingstone, 2003, Livingstone, Bober & Helsper, 2005, Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006, Livingstone, 2006, Livingstone & Helsper, 2007, 2008, Livingstone, 2009, Livingstone & Haddon, 2009, Livingstone & Brake, 2010, Livingstone, 2010). This research focuses on children / young people (9 – 16 years) and their internet use. Since 2009 Sonia Livingstone has worked with many European colleagues to produce – *EU Kids Online project* (Livingstone et al., 2009 - 2011). This is a set of reports looking at children's / young people's use of the internet across Europe, focusing particularly on opportunities and risks. In addition, Sonia Livingstone has

gone on to produce a book <*children, risk and safety on the internet*>, which details much of the research undertaken as part of this project (Livingstone et al., 2012).

A Government report, undertaken by the psychologist Tanya Byron (2008), has looked at children / young people using internet games. This became a spring board for campaigns helping to encourage children / young people to use the internet more safely. Consequently, internet safety day is now an annual event in the UK (UKCCIS, 2014).

Although there is much research about internet use during childhood, there is a need for research which specifically focuses on children (7 – 12 years) communicating on the internet; their thoughts and behaviours during middle childhood. Children's development is different from young people's development therefore some psychological research needs to focus evidence specifically on them. Although there are some studies which do separate age groups (see Hasebrink, Görzig, Haddon, Kalmus & Livingstone, 2011). There is still a need to focus research purely on middle childhood. Communicating via the internet is readily available to them through many different mobile devices now, games and music devices, as well as the mobile phone. Further, the internet is an important way within itself for middle years children to communicate. To look at children communicating via mobile / internet devices is thus important, particularly now that the two technologies have merged as one in the form of smartphone devices.

In summary there is limited research on children's (7 – 12 years) use of mobile phones within psychology in the UK as it is a new behaviour for them, although new research is emerging. This is slightly different for children's use of the internet, where there is evidence available, but it is sometimes combined with other age groups, which in some situations places uncertainties on evidence related to middle years children. Within psychological research children communicating

on their mobile phones cannot be considered without studying the internet too; reflecting the current status of the two technologies merged as one device.

1.3 Why the research focus was selected and its purpose

Thus a modern day focus on child development was selected for the research. The reasons for this are well grounded in my previous experience. In 2008, just before starting this research, I observed that children's use of mobile / internet devices was becoming ever more popular. Children were starting to use mobile phones on a large scale at a much younger age than previous generations. What implications might this have for their development, particularly communication skills? In addition, as a parent with an eight year old daughter at the time, what impact might it have on her development? Further, how would her use of these devices impact upon my role as a parent? Helping to advise parents within my role as a children's nurse and health promotion specialist, I knew that other parents had similar concerns. The EU Kids Online project (Livingstone et al., 2012) had also pointed out that parents were concerned about the different risks that children might be exposed to. More needed to be known so psychologists could support parents with children's new behaviours on their devices.

Having recently submitted for publication a nursing text book on children's health promotion (Moyse, 2009a), children communicating on mobile / internet devices interested me, particularly the sending of inappropriate messages, sometimes referred to as cyberbullying. I had written a chapter on bullying in the book, touching on aspects of cyberbullying (Moyse, 2009b). Researching children's use of these devices would be a valuable way forward for my health promotion and child development work, both within child psychology and children's nursing, as well as helping me personally as a parent.

These were my thoughts and questions prior to starting this research, and were an important influence on the decision to select this research focus. In future I hope to publish articles developed from this research, making recommendations for both child psychology and children's nursing. In future, the evidence discovered will be available to families and psychologists. Observing parents they do have concerns about their children using these devices (Moyse, 2009a, 2011). This research may discover information that will help support them. It may also develop new understandings about children's contemporary behaviour during middle childhood. Some parents may thus feel a little more knowledgeable and consequently children may feel a little more confident when they first start to use their mobile / internet devices. Dishion and McMahon (1998) suggest that to help support others from a health promotion perspective can help to empower them, which this research may go some way to achieving with parents and children.

This first chapter has highlighted a need for research within psychology to focus on middle years children's (7 - 12 years) use of mobile / internet devices. The thesis may provide new insights relating to children's social development. The thesis will also examine the role of parents with children's devices. Chapter one has outlined the context for this research, while chapter 2 presents the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Children and their use of communication technologies have an interesting history; children have always loved engaging with devices that enable them to do different activities, from television, computer games and now mobile phones. The contemporary focus on child development, which has been chosen for this research, leads this second chapter to explore children's current interest in communication technologies – mobile / internet devices in detail, as well as highlighting some of their interests from the past. The chapter begins with a review of young people's use of these devices, as research has been undertaken with them for some years and may help inform children's use. Importantly, keeping knowledge distinctly separate for the two groups, avoiding any confusions. Parents and their role in mediating children's mobile / internet devices is reviewed. The chapter finally discusses how this research proposes to address significant issues raised within the literature review.

2.1.1 Parameters for the literature review

In searching literature for this research clear parameters needed to be set to guide the search. The focus was *children's and young people's use of mobile / internet devices*, along with *parenting* and *parent mediation*. These terms were used as the key search terms. The initial focus was European studies, and some American and Australian studies, with the main focus looking closely at UK studies. As mentioned, few UK studies on children's mobile phone use existed initially. European studies were the most helpful, as in some countries children had been young users of mobile phones before children here in the UK. Towards the end of the research, around 2014 / 2015, more UK evidence became

available. Articles and reports from key journals on children's / young people's use of mobile / internet devices were accessed. Studies relating specifically to middle years children and their mobile / internet devices were searched in detail. Websites relating to children and parenting matters were also consulted (British Broadcasting Corporation, [BBC], National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, [NSPCC], and Parentzone). Google alerts were set up to help maintain a close connection to what was happening within the field, with *children and mobile phones* used as the key search term. Later the term *children's interviews* was added to aid research methodology. Search engines were accessed within the fields of psychology, child development and health. Books on young people's use of mobile / internet devices were read. Conferences were also attended on adults' use of mobile phones and the internet. Direct contact with experts in the field were made; Professor Richard Ling and Dr. Leslie Haddon. Day to day connections were maintained through media; newspapers discussing children's media issues, and technology programs such as *click* (BBC) provided up-to-date information. It was essential to stay connected in this fast moving field of research.

It is important to note that the study of childhood and child development evolves through different disciplines (Prout, 2008), not only psychology. For example Computing, Education, Media, Nursing, Paediatrics and Sociology. Therefore research from other disciplines, as well as psychology, were consulted to help inform the literature review.

2.2 Studying childhood

It is useful initially to look at the concept of childhood itself, before considering children's development with their devices in-depth. Childhood is an evolving concept. How it is viewed by both parents and society has changed and continues to change over time. Recent perspectives from sociology view childhood as an evolving social construct, where both children / young people

are able to have more say in their own lives through discussion with adults (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). This approach steers away from the more authoritarian approaches within families which have previously existed; now allowing all family members to have a voice. As a consequence for children / young people there is less emphasis on authoritarian parenting (Williams & Williams, 2005). This change is viewed as part of a move away from the more traditional approaches within families, referred to as de-traditionalization of the family (Williams & Williams, 2005).

Prout (2000) maintains that despite greater control and surveillance within society itself, generally there has been an increasing tendency to recognise children / young people in their own right, providing them with a voice to negotiate. Following introduction of the Children Act (1989, 2004), where children's / young people's rights were emphasized allowing them to have a say in matters that related to them, the approach spread within UK society. For example education and health care now particularly emphasize children's rights. Increasingly, negotiation within the relationship between parents and children is believed to be important (Williams & Williams, 2005). However, as later discussions reveal this may not be the approach within all families.

Communication technologies matter to children and have for several generations. It is the devices themselves and their functions that change (Haddon & Vincent, 2014), which influence children's behaviours. Families have a crucial role in how children access these devices; negotiating with them about appropriate ways to behave on them. The concept of childhood as a social construct, incorporating negotiation within family relationships and recognising children's rights, underpins the way this research approaches the study of childhood. Before studying children and their devices, young people's use of mobile / internet devices will be considered. This will provide insights into developmental issues which other research has found important within their field.

2.2.1 Evidence from young people

Here evidence about young people's use of mobile / internet devices is reviewed. Their development is discussed too, as it can influence the way young people interact with their devices, which may help inform children's use.

Young people are considered adolescents; the period of childhood that lies beyond middle years. It is a period of dramatic change. The pursuit of increasing levels of independence characterize the social development of adolescents (Erikson, 1968; Cole, Cole & Lightfoot, 2005). Young people begin to look and act more like adults (Steinburg & Silk, 2012). Erikson (1968) believes that the key tasks of adolescence are *independence*, as well as emerging *identity*, as they become more individual.

Parent involvement at this stage of childhood is important but is obviously different from middle childhood. Parents are gradually stepping back and allowing their child to do more for themselves in line with their developmental needs. Dishion and Mahon (1998) maintain that young people still need parental guidance. Parents act as guiding support; available when and as needed.

Young adulthood, the period that lies beyond adolescence, is the final stage before adulthood itself. Young adults have usually gained independence away from family and home. They make career choices and gain financial independence (Arnett, 2014). During this period young adults may even form families of their own (Arnett, 2014). Parents can still sometimes have an influence on the decisions that young adults make.

Young people, as well as young adults, are enthusiastic users of communication technologies. Some were the first generation of young people to experience mobile / internet devices. Research has shown that they have been very quick

to adapt to mobile technology (Plant, 2000; Ling, 2004). Chatfield (2012) maintains the mobile phone is so popular with young people that it is the first item they touch in the morning and the last item they touch at night. Plant (2000) studied young people's use of mobile phones in Europe, Japan, China, Middle East, Pakistan and Scandinavia. She found that wherever she went, no matter what situation she was observing; young people were constantly using their mobile phones to communicate with others.

A wide range of issues are discussed within young people's literature on mobile / internet devices. This includes cyberbullying (Campbell, 2005, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007; Department of Education, 2014), dependency and addiction (Igarashi, Motoyoshi, Takai & Yoshida, 2008; Ki Park, 2009), fashion and identity (Fortunati, 2005, 2009; Katz & Sugiyama, 2009), health (Association for Young People's Health, [AYPH], 2012) both psychological and physical health (Byron, 2008; Health Protection Agency, 2011) and social interactions (Katz, 2009; Ling, 2004, 2008). All the evidence coming from different fields including psychology, sociology, health and telecommunications, as well as different countries.

Studying the literature on young people and mobile / internet devices, particular issues have emerged as important *socializing with friends*, and *independence (freedom)*, which may help to inform research with children. Research on these issues will thus be reviewed in detail.

2.2.1.1 Socializing with friends

Communicating with friends is an actively important part of young people's lives, with mobile phones central to this process (Plant, 2000; Ito, 2009). Interacting with friends can influence who young people are and what they become (Plant, 2000; Steinberg & Silk, 2012). Mobile / internet devices are thus more than simply tools for communication, but they may start to influence how young people perceive their own identity and self-worth, as they communicate with others.

Studies reviewed on *socializing with friends* come from social psychology within the UK, Europe and North America.

Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015) through the Net Children go Mobile project looked at young people socializing with friends. Social networking allowed conversations to continue at the end of the school day even though young people were not together. Young people felt that they could continue to be sociable. They did sometimes encounter negative communications including pornographic materials (Martin & Chamberlain, 2012) and stranger danger (linking up with people they do not know) (Carey & Marsh, 2012), also bullying materials (see Campbell, Spears, Slee, Butler & Kift, 2012; Görzig & Ólafsson, 2013; Cowie, 2013; Smahel & Wright, 2014). Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015) felt that young people needed the skills to manage these negative communications.

The EU Kids Online project (Hasebrink et al., 2011) examined young people's coping strategies when they encountered negative communications. This included - hoping the problem would go away, not using the internet for a while, communicating to others that they had been upset by a problem, and trying to fix the problem by deleting messages and blocking the sender. Similar strategies may help children deal with negative communications on mobile / internet devices. It would be important to consider within the research different types of communications children encounter and how they cope with them.

The literature often considers young people's communications negatively. However, a recent study looks at young people's communications more positively. Boyd (2014) closely examined young people's use of mobile / internet devices in North America. As a researcher for Microsoft she looked at how young people integrated communication technology into their lives. Boyd (2014) interviewed 60 young people (13 – 18 years) and reported how mobile / internet devices had changed their lives, particularly for socializing with friends. These devices were seen by young people as *cool* and fashionable ways to communicate. Young people liked the fact that they could continue to socialize

without having to be physically together, similar to evidence from Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015). Young people embraced different internet sites for communication and meaningful friendships were growing. Fashion or cool was also seen as a way for them to establish their identity. Boyd (2014) refers to the way young people socialized as *networking publically*. She identifies that parents would sometimes become anxious about the way their teens communicated. It will be important to explore how children's communications are discussed in the literature, and if there are similarities as well as differences compared to young people.

2.2.1.2 Independence / freedom

Ling's and Helmersen's (2000) Norwegian study provides an informative view on young people's use of mobile phones, where they also touch on the use of these devices by middle years children. Ling and Helmersen (2000) discuss the age children / young people acquired mobile phones in Norway, which was normally during their teenage years (13 – 18 years). Some parents did not feel it was appropriate for them to have mobiles before this time. Teens found that mobiles were useful for communication, socializing, and helping with the development of their independence, as they moved into more independent ways of life and became more comfortable with their own identity within contemporary culture. Ling's and Helmersen's (2000) study is a key study in the use of mobile phones by young people, and is frequently referred to in articles.

Other studies that draw on similar findings to Ling and Helmersen (2000) include Nafus and Tracey (2002) along with Williams and Williams (2005). Nafus and Tracey (2002) found that the mobile phone was perceived by young people as part of their identity, helping with freedom and independence. Young people particularly found not having to go through their parents to communicate with others provided more individual freedom.

Williams and Williams (2005), on the subject of young people's independence with mobiles, found that having a mobile enabled them to feel empowered; young people could negotiate their freedoms with parents, via text for example. More recent evidence from Haddon (2013) shows that young people continue to enjoy the freedom of organising their social lives through the mobile phone.

These studies, mainly from sociology, demonstrate earlier evidence discussed about young people's development from Erikson (1968), emphasizing the importance of independence and identity during the teenage years. They also show the mobile phone playing a key role in the emergence of independence through socialization. It will be important to see if the mobile phone has similar significance within children's development.

In summary some positive as well as negative issues about young people are evident here on their mobile / internet device use, particularly around communication. Boyd (2014) herself points out that negative issues are more frequently presented, rather than how these devices can help young people's lives. Young people feel that their devices help to support them.

Communication, identity and independence have been identified here as important issues with young people's use. They may be important developmental issues to focus on in learning to understand children's use too.

The research will seek the views of young people, and young adults too, who might be able to offer insights into children's use of devices. Their views will be included as a comparison with children's views. Some of the theories discussed here about young people's use might be helpful, however, this information will be used comparatively, and not combined with children's views, to avoid confusion. Epistemologically, young people's views and theories together will provide important resources for the research.

2.3 Studying childhood - children and their communication technologies

The literature review will continue by focusing on children's development and their use of communication technologies. This section will review children's historic use of communication technologies, and goes on to review their contemporary use of mobile / internet devices. Children's social development and communication skills will be discussed before reviewing this literature.

2.3.1 Children's social development

To understand children's use of mobile / internet devices and what they mean within their lives, children's development during middle childhood will be briefly discussed. This will help developing understandings about what is important at this stage of childhood.

Children (7 - 12 years) have a strong desire to communicate with others of a similar age. Mobile / internet devices affords children this opportunity. Middle childhood encompasses a wide range of development. In the beginning the 7 year old is reliant upon parents, but towards the end of middle childhood the 12 year old is beginning to emerge as an individual, showing a desire for independence (Cole et al., 2005). Middle years children are an interesting group. They are not totally dependent as the under 5s, neither are they pushing boundaries in the way that teenagers may do. This is not to say that middle childhood is an unexciting time. There are lots of interesting aspects of development that begin to emerge, which are important for children socially (Collins, Madsen & Susman-Stillman, 2012) and their interactions with others.

Social development progresses through children's interactions with others. Friendships expand significantly during middle childhood becoming central to

their lives (Collins et al., 2012; Steinberg & Silk, 2012). Older adults in the form of parents and teachers influence social development (Collins et al., 2012). School is very much part of children's daily routine. A significant transition occurs usually around 11 years when children start senior school; they move into a larger social network. Ling and Helmersen (2000) point out that their friends become very important at this time; influencing self-esteem through emotional support and sharing of advice.

Children are involved in a variety of other social settings, not just home and school, although these do tend to be their main settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Other settings include after-school and holiday clubs, leisure activities, as well as friendship settings; different social settings which provide children with a variety of social interactions. These interactions have the power to impact upon their social development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ideas on social development will be discussed more fully later in the chapter, as they play an important role in the thesis.

Change is synonymous with childhood (Bornstein, 2012). As with any stage of childhood, there are changes that occur during the middle years. These changes include emerging physical maturity, advancing cognitive abilities (learning), emotional changes, and adjustment in relationships with others (social), which can influence children's social interactions (Collins et al., 2012). Children's changing development during middle childhood may be observed within this research, as their social behaviours are revealed.

Within psychology middle childhood is the period that seems to be given less attention compared to the under sevens and teenage years. Other researchers too have made similar observations. Collins et al. (2012) commented that middle childhood is not discussed as much as the teenage years, for example. Perhaps, because middle childhood is perceived by some as less important, researchers do not give it the same attention as the other key periods of childhood. Studying children's social development, particularly their

communications on mobile / internet devices, could provide important insights into this stage of childhood which might not have been considered previously within psychology.

2.3.2 Children's communication skills

Communication, verbal or in writing, is central to children's interactions on their devices. Communication is the ability to speak and interact with others. Psychologists believe that communication helps children to convey their thoughts, ideas, and emotions through language (Piaget 1954, 1963; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Leading psychologists have different perspectives on what they believe as important for children's communication skills. Chomsky (1957) believed communication was innate. Skinner (1976) maintained that the environment, through reinforcement, was a key factor. Piaget maintained that cognitive development was essential (Piaget, 1954, 1963, 2013). Vygotsky (1978, 1986) found that cultural context was fundamental, influencing thoughts and social interactions. These different perspectives help psychologists understand children's communication skills, language, and social interactions. Goswami (2008) maintains that today all perspectives are used to inform a developing understanding about children's communication skills and interactions within psychology.

Developmentally, middle childhood is typically a time when children's communication skills are well established. They are able to speak and interact with others confidently. Generally, their reading and writing skills are developing (Oakhill, 1995; Oakhill, Cain & Elbro, 2015). By the end of middle childhood these are well developed. Some may even be literate in a second language. Through communication children explore and test out their own ideas (Cole et al., 2005). Children communicate with their friends, using different devices to do so, particularly the mobile phone (Obee, 2012). Children communicate on their mobiles – talking and texting, playing games, music and videos (Obee, 2012).

The research will investigate children's communications with one another via their devices, to create a contemporary perspective on their development.

2.3.3 Children's historic use of communication technologies

Children have always been interested in new technologies, particularly devices which allow them to listen and communicate. Devices such as radio, television, record players, tape recorders, as well as telephones, have interested children over the generations (Singer & Singer, 2001). Recent changes have centred on home computers, commonly introducing children to the internet (Singer & Singer, 2001). This has been followed by developments with games consoles (ds, Wii, Playstation) and music devices (iPods and MP3 players). Children remain interested in some of these devices, but the one device that has captured their imagination currently the most, is the mobile phone. With the advent of smartphones, children can now have internet access via their mobiles (Chatfield, 2012). More recently tablet devices, multifunctional with internet access, are featuring within their lives (Ofcom, 2012a, 2013), forming perhaps the next phase of children's interest or simply an extension of the present one.

Some of these technologies have come and gone, but through all these changes children have remained faithful to television. Recent reports from Ofcom (2012a, 2013) highlight the continued popularity of television, particularly now that it can be accessed via the internet. Children are able to view their favorite programs when they want, through applications such as iPlayer.

Over the decades there have been concerns about children's involvement with some of these technologies. Television particularly stimulated a vigorous debate. Concerns suggested that it would displace children's reading, as well as program content having a negative impact upon children's understanding of events (Himmelweit, Oppenheim & Vince, 1958). Children were found to like many

different types of programs, including those meant for adults (Himmelweit et al., 1958).

As children's interest in television grew over the decades, some academics remained convinced that it was definitely not good for kids (Paik & Comstock, 1994; Postman, 1994), exposing them to violence and inappropriate material. However, other academics highlighted that if used in the right way television could in fact be positive for children's development. Messenger-Davies (1989) for example, maintained that some children's programs, such as *Blue Peter*, could be educational. If parents and children watched these programs together, children's learning could be advanced.

Similar differences in opinion have been witnessed in recent years about children's video games. LaFrance (1996) suggests that through video games children can create a space for the possible; an imaginary reorganization of one's existence. Yet over the years there have been concerns expressed by parents and others about the impact of these games on children's development, particularly due to their violent nature (see Livingstone et al., 2005; Byron, 2008).

Video games have more recently reinvented themselves for use within computers and mobile devices, and are referred to as digital games (Aarsand, 2013). Parents, along with some professionals, are still concerned and feel that children's behaviour might be negatively affected by these games (Browne & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005). It has certainly been an issue of concern with young people's behaviour (Beranuy, Oberst, Carbonell & Chamarro, 2009; Carbonell, Chamarro, Griffiths, Oberst, Cladellas & Talam, 2012).

The history of children's devices reflects concerns with parents' and professionals' views dominating. There does not appear to be reference to children's thoughts on their devices. More recent studies are beginning to address this, for example children's mobile phone use (see Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014; Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015) and their internet use (see

Hasebrink et al., 2011; Ofcom, 2013). Further, Haddon (2015) has even explored children's views about parent mediation of their devices. All this evidence bringing children's voices to the literature within this field.

2.3.4 Children's current use of communication technologies

The historic background has been discussed, children's (7 – 12 years) current use of mobile / internet devices will now be reviewed. As highlighted in the previous chapter, there is minimal psychological evidence which specifically focuses on middle years children's use of mobile phones. At this time it is especially important to consider these children as a special cohort, as this generation of middle years children have embraced mobile devices with internet access so enthusiastically; becoming a new and important part of their behaviour.

Figures on children's mobile / internet device use are now discussed. Table 2.1 shows figures from Ofcom highlighting a potential increase in children's use of mobile phones over the last few years in the UK. These figures are taken from a few years before the research began, until towards the end of the research, showing growth over this period. The age bands are not exactly compatible due to the different ways data were recorded at the time. Young people's data were also included, but this is due to the way research frequently combines different age groups (see De Souza & Dick, 2009). It is important to note that this increase in children's use has taken place within a social context where adults' use of these devices has also increased. As Chatfield (2012) points out mobile phones are popular with many different age groups, particularly adults.

Table 2.1***Use of mobile phones by children / young people 5 - 15 years.***

Ofcom 2005	Ofcom 2013 (not including tablet devices)
<p>48% (8 - 11 years)</p> <p>700 children 8 - 11 years participated in Ofcom's survey.</p>	<p>58% (5 - 15 years)</p> <p>Almost 1,700 children 5 - 15 years participated in Ofcom's survey.</p>

All types of communication technology used by children / young people are examined by Ofcom (2005 - 2016). Ofcom is the independent monitoring organization for communication technologies in the UK. It regulates television, radio, internet and mobiles, which is authorized by Acts of Parliament (Ofcom, 2016). By reporting each year Ofcom show children's changing trends in use of these technologies. Similar to other researchers (Haddon; 2007, Green & Haddon, 2009), Ofcom (2011, 2012a) found that mobile phones were becoming popular with children, with a growing interest in smartphones developing.

Ofcom's reports have been able to detail the different activities that children undertake on their mobiles. Ofcom (2012a, 2013) found that sending and receiving texts, as well as calls, were the most popular activities for children (8 - 11 years). Smartphone ownership was particularly evident amongst children in Ofcom's (2012a, 2013) reports. Those children with smartphones made and received more calls and messages each week, compared to those who were using mobiles with no internet access. Ofcom (2012a) demonstrates that the volume of text messages had almost doubled for children 8 - 11 years, compared to children in their 2011 report, this applied to both boys and girls

equally. Communicating is a popular activity for children on their mobiles, and becoming increasingly so it would seem.

With the introduction of smartphones (Chatfield, 2012), not long after the start of this research (2009), accessing the internet became a key function of the mobile phone. It brought with it a variety of new and different activities that could be undertaken via mobiles. The internet had been available for some years, which children had quickly learnt to use, particularly through school based activities. Smith (2009) was one educationalist writing advising teachers about children's internet use at the time, and began to include mobile internet access via phones within his texts, reflecting its developing prominence.

Internet figures are now presented. Ofcom (2012a) highlights the following activities children undertake regularly on the internet.

- Searching for information, particularly for homework
- Games
- Watching TV programs or films, via iPlayer.
- Downloading videos and music from YouTube
- Accessing social networking sites
- Sending emails to family and friends
- Accessing avatar sites where children can design a character and play games, such as Club Penguin and Moshi Monsters
- Viewing the news
- Listening to radio programs
- Transactions – buying and selling online.

The internet offers children a wealth of information, communication opportunities, as well as entertainment.

Recent figures on children's use of the internet (Table 2.2) show how their use has increased. As with the mobile phone figures, these were taken from a few years before the research began, until towards the end of the research. Age bands are not compatible, due to the recording of data. However, data is useful in highlighting the growing trend in children's use of the internet.

Table 2.2 <i>Use of the internet at home by children / young people 5 - 15 years.</i>	
Ofcom 2005 Computer / Laptop	Ofcom 2013 Computer / Laptop
61% (8 - 11 years) 68% (12 - 15 years) 700 children 8 – 11 years participated in Ofcom's survey.	81% (5 - 15 years) Children also used mobile phones and tablet devices to access the internet, but the laptop was the most popular way for children to access the internet. Almost 1,700 children 5 - 15 years participated in Ofcom's survey.

Ofcom (2014) maintains that children's most popular internet sites are search websites (Google, Yahoo), YouTube (video clips), BBC and Facebook, with some children spending 10 hours per day on the internet, if the opportunity arises. Children's behaviour, now that the internet has been incorporated within the mobile phone and other mobile devices, means that children can do many of these activities whilst mobile. Children depend less on the home computer for internet access. Effectively, this means that the internet has become more readily available to them. Now the figures have been presented, mobile phone and internet studies will be reviewed.

2.3.4.1 Mobile phones

Studies on children and the mobile phone will be critically reviewed first. Some studies discuss children's *communications* and the trendy or cool nature of the mobile as part of children's developing *identity*. Others, consider the *involvement of family* and associated individual *freedoms*. Most studies available in the field relate to many different behaviours, rather than just focusing on specific behaviours. The studies and behaviours that have been selected here for review are limited to those that are most relevant to the current research.

2.3.4.1.1 Communications

Charlton et al.'s (2002) study of 10 and 11 year olds using mobile phones highlighted the initial interest children were showing. Mobiles were used for the purpose of social interactions; communicating with friends and family. Charlton et al. (2002) suggest that because mobile phones were becoming important for children's social interactions, that in future children who did not have one might feel left out, and not feel part of their social group. Charlton et al. (2002) sampled over 300 children in Gloucestershire; just over 150 children were users of mobile phones. Children who used mobiles were invited to complete a 26 item questionnaire at school. They found that many of the communications children undertook were associated with safety issues. Children reported that mobiles were particularly useful when confronted with a problem or they wanted to request family help. Negative communications were evident too; a small number of children reported receiving negative communications. The researchers conclude that mobiles are important for children's safety and developing some freedoms. Their findings are rather similar to Ling's (2000) research with young people, where feeling safe was revealed as an important part of developing freedom, supported by the mobile phone.

Charlton et al.'s (2002) study is the first study in the field within the UK. It raises some interesting points about the way ahead regarding children's use of mobiles and what impact they might have on those children who do not have access to one. These researchers may have been picking up on feelings from children who were excluded from the study, simply because they did not own a mobile phone. It would have been interesting to find out the views of these children too, so that the views of all children sampled could be fully understood. Nonetheless, these comments do not detract from the importance of Charlton et al.'s (2002) findings, being the first UK study in the field and finding out from children themselves about their views.

In their second study, Davie, Panting and Charlton (2004) provide further insights into children's communications on mobile phones with the same sample. They found that the initiative to purchase a mobile phone was frequently child led; most of the sample who actually owned a mobile said it had been their idea (80%). The researchers suggest a number of reasons for this; attraction as a cool fashion object, along with the social interaction provided by the mobile phone. Importantly, the researchers felt that the issue of mobile phone ownership by children needed to be taken more seriously within psychology in the UK. Overall, these studies show children's emphasis on communications, particularly with regard to their safety and developing freedom, which will be further examined in the research.

2.3.4.1.2 Identity

The perceived cool nature of mobile phones, as a reason why children might want one, has been highlighted by other researchers too. Downie and Glazebrook (2007) looked at children 6 – 13 years in their study on children and mobile phones. It was undertaken from a child psychology consumer perspective in Australia. They found that within their sample of middle years children, the greatest mobile phone ownership was amongst the 10 - 13 year olds. There was less ownership amongst the 6 - 9 year olds, in comparison. Their

study demonstrated that those children who owned a mobile phone displayed competitive tendencies; they liked to keep up with their friends. It was important too that their mobiles looked cool. Children often purchased designers covers for them, in an effort to achieve this. Similar evidence has been found in research with young people (Fortunati, 2009; Katz & Sugiyama, 2009), where the appearance of the mobile was emphasized. Downie and Glazebrook (2007) argue that children are easily influenced by advertisers and marketers. What makes children vulnerable to the consumer market place, particularly in relation to purchasing a mobile phone, is the fact they come fresh and want to keep up with new devices. Children are particularly keen on what they termed the latest cool device, which currently happens to be the mobile phone.

A weakness of this study is that the researchers were drawing on survey data from another paper, rather than undertaking the research themselves; *Young Australians Survey* (Morgan, 2006). It can be difficult to access children's views directly. This could be why they used data from another survey, rather than obtaining original data themselves. However, the study does provide insights into why children might want a mobile phone; looking cool, contributing to their identity (Erikson, 1963, 1968). This study reinforces the earlier findings of Davie et al. (2004).

The coolness factor emerges again in another study by Oksman and Turtiainen (2004), but here they explain what happens when the coolness factor wears off. Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) looked at both children's / young people's use of mobile phones in Finland. They found that there was a rapid increase in use during the 1990s, much earlier than here in the UK. Similar to remarks by Rosen (2011), they found that children were very able in their use of mobile phones. However, they point out that some children tired of their mobiles quickly, once the initial excitement had worn off. This suggests perhaps that having the latest trendy device is cool for a while, but over time the device no longer holds the magic that it once did. It is important to note not all of Oksman's and Turtiainen's (2004) sample felt this way. Some children found the mobile phone a very useful

tool for keeping in contact with parents. The researchers used an ethnographic approach, looking at the meaning of mobile communications for children / young people in Finland. They undertook 800 interviews. However, it is difficult to determine how many of their sample were actually talking about their experiences as children, as this is not identified.

The coolness factor, associated with identity, is a popular theme within children's mobile phone studies, as observed from those reviewed. It would be interesting to explore this further, particularly to see if it actually relates to children, or the evidence is becoming confused with young people's ideas.

2.3.4.1.3 Involvement of family and individual freedom

Other studies reviewed see children keeping in touch with parents, particularly for reasons of safety and developing freedom, as important (see Charlton et al., 2002; Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004). A further example is a research paper by Geser (2006) on mobile phone use by young people in Switzerland. He asked young people to look back at their mobile phone use when younger, as children. He suggests that it was important for them as children to stay in contact with parents because of their freedoms; time spent away from the family. The mobile phone allowed them to keep in touch and feel safe.

Geser (2006) is also particularly interested in the consequences of early adoption of the mobile phone, pointing out that most young people in his research grew up in an environment where their parents had a mobile phone. Consequently, he maintains, they acquired their mobile phone from another family member at a young age, as a result of a mobile being discarded for a newer model. Some of his sample acquired their mobiles prior to 13 years of age. He concluded that the age of acquisition was becoming ever younger in Switzerland. Earlier adoption, he suggests, may have greater long term effects on children's habits; early adoption of the mobile phone, more enduring patterns of mobile phone use. Geser (2006) points out that where the mobile is in the home from when

children are young, they perceive them as a normal part of family life. This is in contrast to evidence from Ling and Helmersen (2000) where parents felt middle childhood was too soon for children to have a mobile phone.

Important points are raised in Geser's (2006) study, particularly in relation to family use of mobiles and their influence on children's use at a young age, children developing *freedom* and involving the family in keeping them safe. Freedom was also discussed briefly by Charlton et al. (2002), looking at how the mobile phone could support children's freedoms. Individual freedom supported by the mobile phone appears to be significant for children. The current research will find out how this evidence relates to UK children in-depth.

In summary children's *communications, identity* and *freedom* were highlighted as important to children's interest in mobile phones. However, some children are not interested in having a mobile phone as Healy and Anderson (2007) found when talking to 10 and 11 year olds about their use of communication technologies for Barnardo's in Northern Ireland. It highlights the importance within the current research of not assuming that all children will be interested in mobiles. The studies reviewed here individually were the main studies available at the start of this research; a small number of studies focusing on children's mobile phone use, from which issues most relevant to children and the current research were selected. The studies looked at children's use or sometimes, as with some of the European studies, asked young people to look back at their mobile phone use as children. From examining the European studies it would suggest that freedom is an important issue, but has not been considered certainly in-depth with children in UK studies.

2.3.4.1.4 More recent evidence on children and mobile phones

Within the last few years more research has become available. Haddon (2007) noted that there was a wealth of studies on young people's use of mobile phones but not so for children. It was evident to Haddon (2007) at this time that

it was important to look at children's mobile phone use because the age of onset was becoming younger in the UK. He predicted that studies would follow. Haddon's (2007) work, a conference paper, outlines his thoughts on children's mobile phone use. He felt that cyberbullying was going to be a significant issue. Governments across Europe were concerned about children's communications on the internet, he noted. However, Haddon (2007) predicted that parents and Governments may well have similar concerns in the future about children's communications on mobile phones. This is interesting, especially for the time, when children's use of mobile phones was just beginning to take off in the UK. Haddon's (2007) work, a conference paper, is talking about children and mobile phones, but most studies referred to relate to young people. This is perhaps not surprising, given that there was so little children's evidence to be drawn upon. Following on from this Haddon wrote about children's use of mobile phones, but focused on children's and young people's use together. A wide range of different issues were explored, including parents' involvement (Ling & Haddon, 2008).

Evidence followed with the EU Kids Online project (Livingstone et al., 2009 - 2011, 2012) undertaken with children / young people (9 - 16 years). As part of this research Stald and Ólafsson (2012) looked at children's use of mobile phones and other mobile devices in relation to their internet use. They concluded that the mobile nature of these devices increased children's opportunities and risks. Their focus was internet access; they did not consider other uses of the mobile phone by children.

The Net Children go Mobile project (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2013, 2014) was initiated following on from the EU Kids Online project (Livingstone et al., 2009 - 2011, 2012). This project researched 3,500 children / young people (9 - 16 years) across Europe accessing the internet via their mobile devices, particularly phones. Children from nine European countries participated. Quantitative and qualitative studies were undertaken. One aspect considered was the appropriateness of children (9 / 10 years) having access to a mobile phone at a

young age. The researchers found that children were usually given a mobile phone when parents thought they needed one or when parents felt they were mature enough to handle one. Children were in fact able to access mobile phones before they owned one; developing mobile skills. Similar to evidence from Geser (2006), children were using family mobiles at a young age.

Mascheroni and Ólafsson (2013, 2014), as part of the project, felt that this was hiding the true age of onset by children. This evidence supports the importance of looking at children younger than nine years in the current research, as in some cases these children could be using mobile phones. However, when questions are asked they might be hidden from data as they do not own a mobile phone. The first studies within the Net Children go Mobile project, rather similar to Stald and Ólafsson (2012), tended to focus on internet access via mobile phones. As studies progressed the focus widened to consider different behaviours children undertook with their mobiles. Many of the later studies included evidence on children's communication behaviours.

O'Neill and Dinh (2014), as part of this project, reported on the findings from Ireland. Their study focused on different uses of the mobile phone, including communication. Findings differentiated between age groups. Receiving negative communications was a concern expressed by younger children (9 / 10 year olds), but was not such a concern for older age groups. The researchers found that younger children were generally upset by these communications, some of which they described as bullying in nature. Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015), also as part of this project, undertook qualitative studies examining children's / young people views about their mobile devices. Focus groups and interviews were undertaken. In contrast to previous studies they showed positive aspects of communication for children. Children's social interactions were found to be about meeting up over a game or video call (Face Time). Children had fun communicating with each other, particularly as they were able to continue conversations after they had parted on their way home from school (Haddon and Vincent, 2014, 2015, Vincent, 2015), similar to evidence from Boyd (2014) on young people.

Children's positive communications will need to be explored within the research, along with negative communications. Negative communications on these devices remain a concern. Bullying or cyberbullying is an aggressive behaviour undertaken by electronic means (Belsey, 2005; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell & Tippett, 2008). Studies which examine cyberbullying in detail tend to combine children / young people together. Recent evidence includes studies by Cowie (2013), and Görzig and Ólafsson (2013). These researchers participated in a European wide project studying the characteristics of cyberbullies, as well as the emotional consequences on their victims, via mobile / internet devices. Negative communications in the form of cyberbullying may be a problem for children, which the research will examine.

In summary from reviewing the evidence so far communication is the reason why children use their mobile phones, with texting being the most popular form of communication (Ofcom, 2012a, 2013). Vincent (2015) found children had fun together with their mobile communications, with children having positive experiences. Some studies are concerned with negative communications, and are anxious about children's ability to cope (O'Neill & Dinh, 2014). Although, Vincent (2015) has recently reported that children were able to cope with the negative communications they received. Thus the evidence tends to be mixed, suggesting that children's skills are likely to vary in handling negative communications. Within the research, when looking at children's communications, it will be important to see how skilled they are at dealing with negative communications on their devices, if indeed this is an issue for them. Further, the evidence on positive communications appears limited, and should be investigated too. Negative communications can only be a small element of the process for children or they would not engage so readily in mobile communications.

Overall, studies discussed are from European perspectives, and often include young people. The current research will just focus on UK middle years children, exploring what their mobile devices mean to them. This will provide a sense of

what is important to children about communicating and interacting on these devices. Recent research is just beginning to address children's mobile phone use. The current research will take this further.

2.3.4.2 The internet

Children's internet studies will now be reviewed. The EU Kids Online project surveyed over 25,000 9 to 16 year olds in 25 European countries (Livingstone et al., 2009 - 2011, 2012) researching their internet use. It was comprised of several reports. The purpose for the researchers in undertaking this was primarily to make the internet a safer place for children / young people (Livingstone & Helsper, 2013). Information is provided about risks and opportunities associated with children's / young people's use of the internet across Europe; mixed findings are highlighted between countries. For example in poorer countries children had less opportunity to access to the internet compared to other countries (Livingstone et al., 2012).

Hasebrink et al. (2011), as part of this project, looks at skill development and differences between age groups. They found that children 9 – 12 years (compatible with the cohort in this research), used the internet for less time than older age groups and used it mainly for homework, along with games and social networking. Hasebrink et al. (2011) also found that these children were less confident in their use of the internet compared to young people. They point out that this finding is at odds with other research from Prensky (2001), where he refers to younger generations as *digital natives*. Prensky (2001) considers that children / young people have competent internet skill levels, which leads them to think in different ways from adults. However, Hasebrink et al. (2011) maintain that it takes time for children to become skilled users of the internet, needing support to do so. Therefore, it may not be quite as easy for children as Prensky (2001) believes for them to acquire internet skills. It will be interesting to observe how confident children are with their internet use in the current research.

The EU Kids Online project is impressive research which brings together some of the best researchers in the field. The research is interested in responses from groups of participants, which would be expected where researchers are taking a social psychology approach to behaviour. Importantly, it differentiates between age groups, so it can be seen what might be different about children's use compared to older age groups, which does not always happen with research in this field.

Selected studies and reports will be reviewed in-depth on children's internet use. They relate to three issues – *freedom*, *safe use*, and *communication*. These issues were identified in the previous section as important to the research on children's mobile phone use. International and European studies will be focused on.

2.3.4.2.1 Freedom - internet access for information

Healy and Anderson (2007), as well as looking at children's use of mobile phones as previously discussed, also looked at their internet use. Focus groups interviews and individual interviews were undertaken with 10 and 11 year olds, some of whom had physical difficulties. Children accessed the internet via their home computer, which would be expected as this was prior to smartphone use by children. Some children had been using their computers since they were 4 / 5 years old. Typical communication activities included emailing and talking with friends via social networking sites. Searching the internet for many was about information for homework. They would find information for school projects so they could undertake PowerPoint presentations. Other researchers have also commented on children frequently using the internet for homework (see Byron, 2008; Tripp & Herr-Stephenson, 2009; Ofcom reports, 2005 - 2014). Buckingham (2006, 2012) maintains that children's education is one of the main reasons why parents invest in the internet.

Healy and Anderson (2007) found that children who owned their computers normally used them at home unsupervised. Similar to findings by Kerawalla and

Crook (2002), who looked at children's home computer use for educational purposes, and found parents took few steps to become involved in children's computer activities. These studies were undertaken prior to the internet becoming mobile, for children at least. Evidence here shows that parents were generally not monitoring their children's internet use closely. This is surprising given that close monitoring by parents is identified as a problem by other researchers (see Boyd, 2014; Mascheroni, 2014). Children were using the internet for homework, so perhaps parents felt that they could be trusted and thus there was less need to monitor their activities.

Prior to the internet becoming mobile parental monitoring seems minimal, allowing some children to experience freedoms with their internet use, certainly in relation to homework. Within the research it will be important to look at parents' approach to monitoring their children's use of the internet, to see how much freedom they are allowing their children to have. How this also compares with the monitoring of young people's internet use by parents, as it would be helpful to see if there are differences. Parenting will be discussed later in the chapter, which will provide more of an insight into their monitoring activities.

2.3.4.2.2 Safe use and games

The most prominent studies on safe use are by Byron (2008, 2010). Tanya Byron was asked by the Government to review children's / young people's internet use, looking particularly at computer games they play and harmful materials they might access. Following an extensive review Byron and colleagues produced the Byron review (2008). This research looked at the views of children (7 - 11 years), young people, parents and professionals in relation to internet safety. The Byron (2008) review undertook research with 30 children / young people and 50 parents. Children were asked to keep a short gaming / internet diary for a week. Focus groups and interviews were also undertaken with some participants. The review found that children had fun with games, which they accessed via a variety of devices. Similar evidence has been found recently through EU Kids

Online project (Hasebrink et al., 2011) and the Net Children go Mobile project (Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015). Byron (2008) revealed that parents were concerned about their children's gaming. However, Byron (2008) was surprised that they were not more concerned about children's broader use of the internet and different types of materials that children could potentially access. Byron (2008) emphasized the importance of safe use, paying particular attention to internet safety in schools, and parents' role with supervision, which as previous studies show, some parents did not always attend to (see Kerawalla & Crook, 2002; Healy & Anderson, 2007).

Byron's (2008) review highlighted the need for parent support with children's internet use, similar to the influential Pew studies (2011) in North America. Byron (2008) suggested strategies that could help children to navigate the internet more safely. Similar to Sonia Livingstone (2008), as well as Livingstone and Haddon (2009), Byron (2008) maintained that there were risks and opportunities for children in accessing the internet. Byron (2008) identified that there seemed to be a generation gap emerging within families, where parents knew less than their children did about the internet. Parents were having difficulties keeping up with their children's knowledge. This links with Livingstone (2003, 2006) who thought that children's growing knowledge about the internet might ultimately bypass parents' knowledge.

Following on from the Byron (2008) review health promotion strategies were implemented to support parents, children / young people with internet safety, for example the campaign *Click Clever Click Safe* (UKCCIS, 2009), and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) with the *thinkuknow* campaigns (CEOP, 2010). After the Byron (2008) review the United Kingdom Council for Children's Internet Safety (UKCCIS) was created (Byron, 2010). Its aim to help children / young people and parents to become better informed about internet safety (UKCCIS, 2014). *Internet Safety day*, held 11th February each year, supports children with their internet use through campaigns and information. Such campaigns are supported by children's charities (NSPCC, ChildLine) and

leading organizations (BBC). As part of internet safety day the BBC recently helped to encourage children to use their internet cameras more safely (webcam), by suggesting children keep them covered when not in use to avoid risks (BBC, 2014). UKCCIS, along with CEOP, supports schools with education activities and advice (Byron, 2010). The UKCCIS (2012), in conjunction with the Government (Department of Education, 2012a, 2012b), continues to look at children's internet safety and to make recommendations, following on from the success of the Byron (2008) review.

Some of the recommendations developed from the Byron review (2008, 2010) are not new. Livingstone et al. (2005) originally highlighted the importance of internet safety training for children (9 - 11 years). However, more safety activities and campaigns have been initiated since the Byron review (2008, 2010) was published, including training in schools for children and parents. It has been groundbreaking in helping to encourage children to use the internet more safely. Internet safety day is widely publicized each year and promotes important messages on safety for children.

A growing interest in recent years about children's internet safety is evident from these studies. This is important so children are able to learn to communicate appropriately and safely on the internet. The current research will explore if and how safety within children's internet communications is apparent.

2.3.4.2.3 Communication - social networking and identity

Studies show that children communicate in different ways on the internet with social networking becoming increasingly popular. They access social networks via games or specific social networking sites, such as *Club Penguin*, *Moshi Monsters*, and *Facebook* (Ofcom, 2013; Austin, 2013); most are age appropriate, others not. Livingstone and Brake (2010) talked about the new opportunities that social networking provides for children. The focus of their article is children / young people, where they differentiate between age groups. These authors

identified that there were pros and cons with social networking; generally they perceived it positively. They believed social networking could provide children with a wide social network of friends, which Boyd (2014) and the Pew studies (2011) also found in their research with young people.

One of the main behaviours Livingstone and Brake (2010) focused on was *identity*; the presentation of self on the internet. This links very much with children's development, particularly towards the latter end of middle childhood (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Children's identity starts to become important to them, just as it is for young people (Collins et al., 2012; Madsen & Susman-Stillman, 2012; Steinberg & Silk, 2012). Livingstone and Brake (2010) maintain that children have a strong desire to connect with others. They believe that identities are constructed through interaction with others, similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ideas. Social networking allows children to connect with others without the embarrassment of face-to-face interactions, helping with identity development.

Livingstone and Brake (2010) highlight how social networking sites are in fact targeted at young people and adults, however children are able to access them. They state that many 8 - 12 year olds have a social networking profile (as evidenced from Ofcom, 2008a, 2008b). Recent figures from Ofcom (2013) show that there is a slight decline in social networking for children, although the overall trend has been on the increase since 2008. Livingstone and Brake (2010) acknowledge there are concerns with social networking, particularly with cyberbullying and the need for children to keep information private on these sites, but they believe it can have benefits.

It is important to note that children need to take care on these sites, as they can get themselves into difficulties. For example Hasebrink et al. (2011) found that children were not good at keeping some of their information private on the internet, compared to young people who understood the importance. There are ways children can participate in social networking via sites that have been specifically created for them such as *Moshi Monsters* and *Club Penguin*, which

are monitored. Children need to be careful with social networking during middle childhood, particularly if they want to avoid negative communications.

Ofcom's (2008 - 2014) series of reports, using large scale studies with mainly survey methods, have also considered children's / young people's social networking. They found that many middle years children had a social network profile, which they shared with their friends. Children were interested in *Club Penguin* and *Moshi Monsters*, which were perceived as safe sites. There were a number of aspects associated with social networking which children disliked and felt they needed to be cautious about. Children were thus not happy to give out their personal details. Further, most said they did not link up with people that they did not know.

Ofcom's studies show that children themselves were concerned about social networking and seemed to understand the risks. Overall, there seems to be mixed findings on children's engagement with social networking, with evidence of other children being less aware of the risks (Hasebrink et al., 2011). Factors such as age and skill may influence children's use of the internet for communication. Parents can support children's use and the current research will see how they do this.

In summary the literature, mainly from child psychology and social psychology, highlights *freedom to search for information, safety (on games) and communication (social networking)* as providing the basis for children's use of the internet. Over time there seems to be a growing awareness within society about children's internet safety; moving from a position of little concern to greater concern. Different internet safety strategies have since been introduced (Byron, 2008, 2010) with some success. For example Ofcom (2014) is now reporting fewer concerns amongst parents about children's use of the internet. Importantly too, children's play on the internet should not always be viewed as problematic (Sandvig, 2006). It would seem similar to television that children can learn from their internet experiences, particularly with parents' support. From the literature

reviewed on the internet, freedom to communicate with others matters to children.

Trying to distinguish between children's use and young people's use of the internet within studies has sometimes been difficult. There have been improvements within more recent studies. It is useful to distinguish between age groups because of the developmental differences between children and young people, which will influence what they access and how they communicate on the internet. Young people may prefer social networking; catching up on the latest gossip. Children may prefer accessing a game involving an animated character. It is important to understand what is unique about children's use of the internet, which can be helped by comparing it with young people's use. The literature reviewed on the internet has helped to identify children's areas of interest for the research.

2.3.5 Children's views

To understand about children's use of mobile / internet devices it would be important to ask children themselves. Children's views did not always come through strongly enough within some of the research evidence presented in the literature review. Although more recent studies do seek children's views. Many of the studies used survey methods. Although helpful, survey methods do not always allow researchers to get close to what children are thinking. Within surveys children provide brief answers to questions and the researcher is unable to question further; beyond the response given. However, qualitative research methods allow researchers to explore beyond the immediate response, if required; allowing meanings to be carefully explored. To study children closely and find out what their devices mean to them, could be achieved through a qualitative research methodology. Having discussed children and their devices, the next section will look at the role of parenting.

2.4 Parenting

The literature review now takes a different focus. This section looks at parents' views on children's use of mobile / internet devices. It relates to the second part of the research, which will look at parents' role with children's mobile / internet devices. Literature on parenting and parent mediation strategies are reviewed.

Hoghugh and Long (2004) state that parenting is a purposeful activity aimed at ensuring the safe development of a child. Parenting can be a complex process as it constantly needs to change according to the changing needs of the child (Bornstein, 2012). The role of parenting, encompassing care and support, also needs to be adaptable, helping to prepare the child for what lies ahead. James and Prout (1997, 2015) view parenting as a social construct which in itself has changed over time. Indeed, the role of parenting has changed to be more supportive than it was generations ago. As highlighted earlier, the family has become less traditional, allowing individuals, including children, to have a voice. As Williams and Williams (2005) point out children can now be involved in discussions and decisions about matters that relate to them. This impacts upon how parents relate to them, involving children in parenting decisions.

2.4.1 Changes to parenting

Parenting has evolved over the generations. During Victorian times for example, children were expected to be seen and not heard. They were expected to do very much as their parents and others instructed. Children were soon punished harshly if they failed. Reading tales from the renowned author Charles Dickens (1838, 2000) these harsh realities are plainly depicted. Contemporary notions of parenting embrace much kinder values. Warmth and supportiveness are considered essential qualities of good parenting within psychology (authoritative parenting, see Baumrind, 1966, 1973; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). These qualities have been reiterated more recently (see Children's Society, 2012a, 2012b).

Listening to children is also perceived as essential quality of good parenting (Children's Society, 2013; NSPCC, 2014).

The legal system now determines that children have rights, with parents responsible for attending to children's needs (Children Act, 1989, 2004). Negotiation within parent-child relations is essential, instead of parents imposing their wishes upon children as in the past. There is greater closeness between parents and their children. All perceived as part of the process of de-traditionalization of the family (Williams & Williams, 2005).

Since the 1980s and 1990s particularly, there has been a growing trend towards more positive values within parenting, which is referred to as *positive parenting* (Sutton, 1996; Home Office, 1998). This approach has been taken up by child psychologist Tanya Byron (2005) and child development expert Jo Frost (2006), promoting these values within their television programs on parenting. Further, as discussed (section 2.3.4.2.2); Byron (2008) has specifically looked at parenting in relation to children's / young people's internet use.

Psychologists encourage positive parenting practices; helping parents to be more positive with their children, which have some of their origins in Skinnerian (1976) principles of rewards and reinforcements. Advice is given through behavioural programs. Being part of such initiatives myself, through the *Sure Start* program, has been insightful (Moyse, 1999; Lorenz, Moyse & Surguy, 2005). The *Sure Start* program was influenced by *Project Head Start* in America, for which Bronfenbrenner was one of the key founders. Smith, Cowie and Blades (2003) maintain that Bronfenbrenner wanted to help advance children's development, particularly for those living in poorer communities, through support from society, influenced by his theory on social development (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979). *Sure Start* within the UK was introduced based upon similar principles.

Warmth, discipline and responsiveness as discussed, are essential positive values of good parenting. Some of these values originate in Baumrind's (1966, 1973,

1991) research on parenting styles and have resurfaced in more recent literature on parenting. For example Lexmond and Reeves (2009) in their report for Demos (Government UK Think Tank), are supportive of Baumrind's approach. They believe it offers consistency, with parents delivering rules through warmth and responsiveness. Middle childhood features significantly within their report. It has been refreshing to see middle childhood at the centre of such discussions.

The Children's Society report *A good childhood* (Layard & Dunn, 2009), also discuss the importance of parenting which is both loving but disciplined in nature. This report particularly points out the importance of a mother figure during childhood. Originally, the importance of a mother figure was emphasized by Bowlby (1953). Bowlby's (1953) work had a strong influence on parenting during the 1950s / 1960s. However, it was criticized because it left many mothers feeling that they could not leave their children, particularly to return to work (Rutter, 1981). Now, in many families, both parents working has become an accepted norm (Pattison & Moyse, 1995). To facilitate this process schools play a supportive role offering both after school clubs and holiday clubs, available to care for children. Some schools have become Extended Schools to facilitate this extension in children's day (Lindsay, Band, Cullen & Cullen, 2008). This offers children different social opportunities.

The evidence from *A Good Childhood* (Layard & Dunn, 2009) has been further extended in reports from the Children's Society - *The Good Childhood* (2012a) and *How Happy are our Children* (2012b), and more recently *The Good Childhood* (2014). These reports look at the different factors in children's lives which make them happy. Similar to the two previous reports discussed (Lexmond & Reeves, 2009; Layard & Dunn, 2009), they consider warmth, discipline and responsiveness as essential in the relationship between parents and their children. The trend up to now within psychology has been to encourage parents to be loving and supportive with their children, allowing children to have a voice. This sits well beside sociological perspectives discussing and advocating negotiation within families (Williams & Williams, 2005).

However, more recently a different style of parenting has started to emerge. One which is quite different from the warmth and responsiveness associated with positive parenting. It has not emerged from within psychology, as positive parenting did, but from observations of current styles of parenting adopted by parents themselves. It is referred to as *helicopter parenting* (Nelson, 2010). This style of parenting is disciplined; strong discipline and control dominate. Fuller (2010) describes helicopter parenting as a process of parents hovering over their children doing too much for them (fighting their battles) and not allowing them to tackle challenges for themselves. Nelson (2010), a sociologist, first used the term helicopter parenting to describe the hyper-involved parent. Clark (2014) provides examples of mothers requiring constant contact with their children. This type of parenting is seen as out of control by Nelson (2010).

Helicopter parenting seems quite similar to the authoritarian style of parenting, originally described by Baumrind (1966, 1973), as a contrast to her authoritative parenting. Authoritarian parenting is very disciplined and controlling, and does not provide children with opportunities to think for themselves. It might have consequences for children's social development, as they might not be confident to act independently.

These are some of the different styles of parenting that exist which are influencing parenting today. Parenting styles are important because they may impact upon children's development, as later discussions reveal. Understanding these different parenting styles may help within the research when considering how parents manage their children's use of mobile / internet devices.

An important part of parenting is to be able to access information which provides parents themselves with support; helping parents to undertake their role effectively. Parents are able to access information from professionals as discussed, but other sources such as books, radio programs, television and more recently of course the internet. Television programs are a particularly popular way. Such programs as the *House of Tiny Tearaways* with Tanya Byron (2005),

Supernanny with Jo Frost (2006), have been popular in recent years. With the availability of internet, parents can now access these programs at a time that suits them. Parents can also use websites for advice such as *Mumsnet* (2014), which is growing in popularity, where parents can discuss their concerns, opinions on parenting, as well as other matters, through internet discussion. Television and the internet have certainly helped to support parents. The television programs mentioned have been followed with interest by many parents, as discussed on Mumsnet itself (www.mumsnet.com 2009). All these sources recognize the need for parents to have support within their role, which will be considered within the research in relation to parenting children's devices.

In summary parenting now generally comprises of less harshness, with greater warmth and negotiation emphasized. However, the development in some situations of a more controlling style of parenting, with the advent of what has been termed helicopter parenting, may not be beneficial for children's development. Different approaches or styles of parenting may impact upon the way parents manage their children's use of mobile / internet devices, which will be explored within the research, particularly as the parenting of middle years children involves considerable input, more so than the parenting of teenagers. The following section will examine parent mediation to find out how parents manage children's use of their devices, which may show evidence of parenting styles. Parenting styles and parent mediation will be further explored within the research.

2.4.2 Mediation of young people's and children's use of mobile / internet devices

Evidence on parents' mediation of children's devices is reviewed. It is an important part of parents' role currently, as children develop a greater interest in their devices. Literature is mainly drawn from mediation of children's / young people's use of the internet, and literature on mediation of children's television

was helpful too. Evidence on mediation associated with children's use of the mobile phone is just starting to emerge, and is thus included. Studies are from different countries and are mainly drawn from psychology and sociology.

2.4.2.1 Young people and parent mediation

A prominent issue to emerge within young people's literature was parent mediation of their devices. This section will review parents' approach and the mediation strategies they use with young people, to help with the developing understanding on children's use of their devices.

Boyd (2014) in her book looks closely at the role of parents within young people's freedom. She discovered in her interviews that some young people grew up with limited freedom. They did not have the advantage of friends living nearby to socialize with. Fears about danger in the community meant that parents would restrict their freedom. However, young people's devices allowed them to *hang out* together online. Young people grew up with restricted lives influenced in part it seems by parents' concerns about the local community, but their devices gave them a platform whereby they could make up for what was lost; communicating with friends.

Boyd (2014) suggests that parents are far too interested in young people's communications and should let them have more privacy. Young people want to gossip and share passions, but they want privacy from parents to do so. This type of intense parenting, she says, is apparently not uncommon in North America. Boyd (2014) maintains teens get upset when they are not left alone by parents. Within Europe similar evidence has been found. Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015) found that parents would closely monitor young people's behaviours on their devices. Young people felt that parents were generally too concerned. Haddon (2015) maintains that as young people acquire more freedom and independence they will want more privacy with their communications.

Parental monitoring is important for young people's safety, but it would seem that constant monitoring has the capacity to interfere with their social interactions, as these studies show. It would be interesting to explore if this also occurs within children's communications on their devices. This concept of over-monitoring or over-parenting, where parents are mediating devices excessively, is intrusive. Haddon (2013) suggests that parents need to think carefully about parent mediation. To foster the supportive and negotiating relationship, advocated in the previous section, may be more appropriate for parent mediation. Constantly monitoring communications, as Boyd (2014) has identified, is not going to help. There is a sense that the negotiating relationship Williams and Williams (2005) discuss does not always exist within childhood, certainly for some young people. This raises some interesting questions for children's use of their devices in the current research. Does negotiated parenting occur for children within parent mediation of their devices, or similar to some young people, they experience over-monitoring and restrictions.

More detailed accounts on the negative effects of restrictive mediation comes from a study by Tripp (2010). Latino immigrant families in North America were observed and interviewed about young people's (12 – 14 years) use of the internet. Parents were torn between use of the internet for educational purposes and their own concerns about the sorts of material young people might be accessing. Tripp (2010) found that less well educated parents tended to be strict in their mediation of young people's use of the internet. Parents did not use devices themselves, and had a poor understanding about them; resulting in limited access for young people. It would seem that parents had reduced young people's opportunities, due to the strict controls they had put into place. Perhaps, giving parents more knowledge about mobile / internet devices, may result in less restrictions and more opportunities for young users, which Ofcom (2012a, 2012b) has suggested. Tripp's (2010) study provides important evidence related to mediation for young people. Although the article can become confusing in places as the terms young people and children are used

interchangeably. Overall, evidence on parent mediation about young people's use of devices will be helpful to the research.

2.4.2.2 Children and parent mediation

For some parents it may be difficult to determine how much or how little they need to mediate children's mobile / internet devices, in an effort to ensure safe use for them. The following will review key reports on parents' and professionals' thoughts on mediation of children's use of mobile / internet devices. These studies have been selected as they help to establish current thinking on the subject. Further, they will help to inform evidence produced within the research.

Byron's (2008) review, as previously discussed, focuses on internet safety. As part of this research 50 parents were interviewed about mediation. Some parents felt helpless because of gaps in their knowledge; children knew more than they did about managing the internet. Byron (2008) envisaged that over time parents would become more comfortable with the management of children's online safety, but in the meantime they needed support. This went on to be provided through training in schools for children and parents (see section 2.3.4.2.2). Byron (2008) touched on children accessing the internet via their mobile phones. She outlined that it would present a new set of challenges for both parents and schools. The review continues to have an important impact on children's internet safety.

Livingstone et al. (2009 – 2011, 2012) for the EU Kids Online project, found that internet mediation was important within parenting, with various strategies being used. Parents would promote safe internet use, discuss with children about their online activities, along with some parents even sitting with children while they used the internet to provide further support. Parents would monitor their children's use and restrict the amount of time they could spend online. Technical restrictions included the use of online filters. These strategies have some similarity in approach to those advocated by Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters and Marseille

(1999) in relation to children and television. These researchers divided mediation strategies into three groups – active mediation (talking to children about mediation), restrictive (setting rules), and co-viewing (engaging in media together).

Within the EU Kids Online project (Livingstone et al., 2009 – 2011, 2012) several studies on mediation are detailed. Mediation is considered from a wide perspective; not just what parents can do, but considers the role of teachers and how children can help each other too. Pasquier, Simões and Kredens (2012) looked at teacher mediation (school) and peer mediation (child to child) which they found could help with children's online safety. Support from teachers and friends could help children develop safety skills. Mediation by peers was triggered by a child having a negative experience online and a friend responding supportively. Cowie (2013) has suggested a similar strategy in relation to cyberbullying, with peers supporting one another. Studies show that mediation is not just parents' responsibility.

Garmendia, Garitaonandia, Martinez and Casado (2012) explored parents' mediation strategies. They found, similar to Livingstone and Helsper (2008), and Kirwil, Garmedia, Garitaonandia and Martinez Fernández (2009), that restrictive mediation was the most effective; limiting children's amount of internet use. But Garmedia et al. (2012) felt this should be considered in relation to perceived risks and opportunities for each child. Studies show that restrictive strategies were perceived as the main approach to mediation, certainly until recently.

Over the years Ofcom reports have highlighted the important role of parent mediation. In recognition of its importance Ofcom recently produced a specific report on parent mediation (Ofcom, 2012b). Different problems were presented and management discussed. An example of a problem requiring parent mediation is presented. Ofcom (2012a, 2012b) found that children 8 - 11 years were using the social networking site Facebook. This is under the age limit permitted of 13 years (Austin, 2013). Children were being monitored directly by

their parents on Facebook; parents were Facebook friends with their child. Ofcom (2012b) maintains that parents were worried about cyberbullying and who their children were befriending. Therefore, parents became Facebook friends, so they were aware of exactly what was happening with their child online. However, as Boyd (2014) pointed out this could be viewed as interfering. The example shows close monitoring of children's internet use, other examples are presented in the report. It was interesting to read a report that looked specifically at parent mediation of children's devices, highlighting its importance currently within parenting, and providing examples.

The Government has a role too with mediation. During 2012 the UKCCIS was asked by the Government to look at children's internet safety, particularly the technical controls known as parental controls (Department of Education, 2012a, 2012b). The conclusion was that family friendly filters would be selected for all new internet customers by the end of 2014 (Home Office, 2013). Importantly however, not all parents are confident with the use of online filters ([www.mumsnet](http://www.mumsnet.com); [www.parentzone](http://www.parentzone.co.uk) 2013). Perhaps more still could be done to help parents at the point of sale by retailers with parental controls.

Some studies on mediation of the mobile phone have appeared more recently. O'Neill and Dinh (2014) in Ireland for the Net Children go Mobile project found that parent mediation strategies could be restrictive, similar to earlier evidence on internet studies (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Kirwil et al., 2009; Garmendia et al., 2012). But in contrast some parents were supporting children's use, trying to encourage them to use their mobile phones safely (O'Neill & Dinh, 2014). A recent report (Ofcom, 2013) discussed parents' concerns about cyberbullying, when children accessed the internet via the mobile phone. This shows the emergence of parents' concerns about children's use of mobile phones, which previously researchers predicted could become an issue (Haddon, 2007; Byron, 2008). Mobile phone mediation is now emerging as an area of research within children's use of these devices.

The main theme within mediation literature is as expected parent mediation. The role of mediation is considered from different perspectives, identifying that although parents play a key role, there are others who can and do have a part to play. Children themselves can begin to mediate their own use, particularly as they become more skilled with their devices and take on more responsibilities. It would be important to explore children's views on mediation, to see what role they have in managing their own use. The studies presented here show how parents' mediation strategies are starting to be supportive, but as in other areas of children's device use parents are concerned, which can result in them opting for restrictive strategies. An additional problem for parents with phones is that they are mobile, which as Haddon (2013) points out, can make physical monitoring more difficult. Over time it seems that parents have become more aware of mediation strategies.

2.4.2.3 Parents' mediation strategies

As well as looking at policies and reports on parents' mediation of children's devices, there is also a need to look closely at the individual strategies parents use to keep their children safe, which will help to provide a more informed understanding about their parenting approach. Based on evidence so far presented within the literature review, there has been a tendency for parents' strategies to be restrictive. Yet, this is at odds with the current ethos on childhood within the UK, advocating negotiation and discussion (Williams & Williams, 2005).

Mascheroni (2014) explored mediation of children's mobile phones in Italian households. This study looked at parenting styles and how they influenced parent mediation. Mascheroni (2014) undertook focus groups with parents and children. The findings demonstrated that children's (10 – 13 years) use could be influenced by parenting style. Helicopter parents tended to be less effective; they were critical and controlling. In contrast, parents who were authoritative and negotiated with children about their mobile phone use, were more effective. What seemed to contribute towards authoritative parents' success

was their use of different strategies. They expected their children to be responsible, and did not limit their use of smartphones. Mascheroni (2014) maintains that authoritative parents had high levels of engagement with their children; avoiding strict rules and negotiating with them.

This recent evidence thus suggests that using different strategies can be effective and helpful in mediation. Further, involving children in the process of mediation, rather than imposing strict rules upon them, has more success. Mascheroni's (2014) evidence on parenting styles also is contemporary. It illustrates how unhelpful the helicopter style of parenting can be, whereas the authoritative style of parenting appears more effective.

In another innovative move Mascheroni (2014) explored children's views on parent mediation of their devices, which demonstrated that children were not too critical. Similar to the research here, she makes the point that children's views are not always acknowledged within research on communication technologies. Perhaps research is now becoming more aware of the value of including children's views. Haddon (2015) has also recently explored children's / young people's views on parent mediation.

Both Tripp's (2010) research with young people and Mascheroni's (2014) study with children places doubt about the value of restrictive mediation strategies with mobile / internet devices. Parent mediation strategies need to be undertaken to ensure safety, but they need to be supportive too. Supportive strategies may yield greater cooperation from children, incorporating negotiation, as childhood studies now advocate (Williams & Williams, 2005). The child is then involved in mediation, rather than being told how mediation will take place.

Mediation with negotiation requires parents to think how it will work, some examples are provided. How parents *communicate* with their children is important. As Baumrind (1966, 1973) suggests to do so with warmth, as opposed

to more authoritarian language, can help. Also, *monitoring*, although it has been discussed here in terms of overuse, evidence suggests that if parents explain to children why some monitoring is required, children may be more cooperative; helping them to stay safe (Patterson, 1993; Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Other examples include *role modelling* and *guidance*. Parents may be enthusiastic users of mobile / internet devices themselves. By role modelling (Bandura, 1977) appropriate mobile phone behaviours, can help children to learn how to use their devices appropriately. Guidance too, taking children to exhibitions (Tobin, 1998) such as the *Gadget show* where they can learn more about their devices, may be useful.

These examples fit with Valkenburg et al.'s (1999) ideas about parents and children working together with mediation. Authoritative mediation strategies are varied (see Mascheroni, 2014), as the examples demonstrate. Within parenting today they provide more creative solutions to mediation, than restrictive strategies offer. Valkenburg, Taylor Piotrowski, Hermans and de Leeuw (2013) have also looked at parenting styles and mediation strategies. They found that authoritative parents take children's feelings seriously, and provide reasons for rules. This is in contrast to the more controlling parent. Valkenburg et al. (2013) looked at mediation for 10 - 14 year olds with mobile / internet devices. Authoritative parents were more likely to achieve positive results.

From the evidence reviewed parents might need to understand more about children and their devices, particularly if they want to support children's use. Lambert, Wagner and Gebel (2014) suggest that there is a need to empower parents through education for mediation, helping parents to become more supportive by being child sensitive and aware of their devices. As highlighted in chapter 1, in the future evidence found within this research may contribute to educating parents about children's devices, so they feel empowered to support their children.

In summary parent mediation plays an important role in children's devices, both parenting style and mediation strategies used, as evidenced from the studies reviewed. Parenting style and mediation strategies appear to work together. The evidence suggests that the social construct of childhood, with more negotiation advocated in the relationship between children / young people and their parents, does not occur for all. Evidence highlighted that for some young people their use of devices could be over-monitored, due to parents' restrictive strategies. Might over-monitoring also be an issue for middle years children? The research will need to explore parent mediation to understand how it impacts upon children and their use of devices.

A challenge for parents might be, not only how they perceive their role in managing children's devices, but also how they deal with their own concerns about children using them, particularly as children are young users of these devices. Parents' views will be examined in the current research, particularly looking to see if they have concerns and how these concerns might impact upon children's behaviour with their devices.

2.4.3 Parents' views

The current research will gain insights into parents' thoughts about children's use of mobile / internet devices and how they perceive their role. Children's use seems so entwined within parenting during middle childhood that it could provide further information about children's use within itself. Potentially, what could be learnt about parent mediation of children's use of mobile phones might be important for child development. There may be aspects to explore which are different and unknown, which may not have been considered previously in relation to children. After all the mobile phone is a different way for children to access the internet and communicate, rather than doing so via a computer at home. The very fact that the phone is now mobile gives rise to different issues for children's use and parents' mediation. Importantly too, how

do parents currently feel about the support available to them; do they need more or do they now feel confident in managing children's devices? Parents may need continued support, which the research will explore.

2.5 The current research

The literature review has been presented highlighting the limited range of UK literature that was available at the start of this research on children's (7 – 12 years) mobile phone use. The field has grown since this research first began with more literature becoming available. Research on children's use of the internet was also reviewed, as the internet is now part of the mobile phone. European literature and literature from different disciplines, such as sociology, helped to inform the review.

The current research proposes to take a different approach from previous research. To look closely at just middle years children's (7 – 12 years) use of these devices, particularly mobile phones, rather than considering them alongside other age groups. A more informed understanding about this age group will be developed for psychology. Mobile phones have become popular with children (Haddon, 2007; Ofcom 2008 - 2013). There is more to discover about children's use of these devices and their impact within the family.

Of particular interest for this research will be children's *communications* and what they mean to them, particularly looking at the more *positive* aspects. Research has tended to focus on the negative aspects of children's communications on their devices. Further, how mobile devices might be involved in the development of *independent* behaviours during middle childhood. Evidence, particularly from young people's research will be important here as a comparison. There are established theories available within their field (see Ling & Helmersen, 2000, for example), which will be informative. Developmentally, doing the same as their friends is important to children's

identity during middle childhood (Erikson, 1963, 1968). The impact of all these behaviours surrounding children's device use will be explored. For parents, the literature demonstrated that their *approach to parenting*, and the *mediation strategies* they put in place with devices, had an impact upon young people's behaviours. It will be important for the research to explore parents' role to ascertain what impact their approach might have for children and their devices. Researching all these areas may reveal new insights for psychology. Many of these issues were initially identified through discussion with participants and then linked to the literature.

The current research can explore all these issues thoroughly with children and parents. Children's voices were not heard within some of the evidence presented in the literature. It is important to find out what children think by asking them. Children are able to describe the reality of their communication experiences. They might be more positive about their mobile / internet communications, than others tend to be. By taking a qualitative approach the research will be able to get close to what children think. Interactions between children and their parents will be investigated. The following questions will be applied to the research.

Research question 1:

What do mobile phones / internet devices mean to children (7 – 12 years) within their lives, as described by children themselves?

Research question 2:

What are parents' views about their role within children's use of mobile phones / internet devices?

Parents' views will be explored to determine their role and its potential impact on children. As the literature has illustrated *parents' concerns* feature significantly within debates about children's communication technologies. Parents' concerns are likely to be influential within this research context too, particularly

because children are young when they first start to use mobile phones, certainly compared to previous generations of children. By being aware of parents' concerns and trying to understand them, may be important for the research. Parents' concerns, and children as a special cohort because of their early adoption of mobile phones, are both *social processes* that can underlie children's and parents' behaviours. These social processes are not obvious when observing their interactions. However, they do influence what is happening within those interactions, and will be explored.

Another important social process is the behaviour of *children compared to young people*, which influence how others react towards children within interactions about their devices. Children's behaviour is typically less mature. The research will look at differences in behaviour between them with their devices. Young people's theories as well as views will be sought, and then compared with evidence from children. This will help to inform the developing understanding about children and their mobile / internet devices.

The research questions have been written to guide exploration of both children's views and parents' views. The social processes have been revealed through reviewing current literature sources, and are also of interest to me, the researcher. They will be discussed further in the next chapter and formulated as research aims, along with the specific issues identified as important to the research. Next, how the epistemological approach was selected will be discussed. Epistemology underpins how the research questions and social processes will be explored.

2.5.1 Critical realism

Epistemology determines how knowledge is perceived; what is actually considered as knowledge. Epistemological approaches help inform new knowledge and understanding within research. Different epistemological

approaches were considered. Initially, a constructivist approach was considered, but was found not to provide the individual personal perspectives required. Constructivist approaches are interested in how individuals and society together construct meaning. Discourse analysis is one such approach which is interested in how society constructs meaning from the language it uses (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). The epistemological approach selected would need to value individuals' realities; participants' personal realities, as participants' views were going to be fundamental for discovering meanings. Further, the epistemological approach needed to value theoretical perspectives, which would help to inform personal realities. Individual realities and theories combined together creating new knowledge.

Theoretically this presented a problem for the research, as there was minimal evidence specifically focusing on children's use of mobile phones. However, there was a wealth of evidence on young people and their use. Many studies have been undertaken with young people and their devices (for example Plant, 2000; Ling, 2000, 2004, 2009; Katz, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2009 - 2011).

Theoretical perspectives and views too from young people would provide valuable epistemological resources to overcome the lack of theory with children. Importantly, the epistemological approach selected would need to keep young people's views and knowledge separate from children's views, to avoid any confusion surrounding children's development.

Critical realism was considered, particularly Bhaskar (1989), the originator of this approach. After studying different perspectives on critical realism, Maxwell's (2012) approach was selected. His approach to critical realism sees individuals' perceptions on reality, alongside what is known about the world already (theories), as resources for research. Using a critical realist approach would allow new knowledge to develop about children and their mobile phones within the context of children's own perceptions of reality, alongside existing knowledge (developed from young people). This would provide an epistemological context for the research that would be insightful, as well as socially diverse, allowing

differences to be identified between children / young people, highlighting children's development.

What is especially important about critical realism is how it sees the relationship between participants' realities and existing knowledge as fundamental for creating new knowledge. Knowledge and realities working together to understand social phenomena and generating new theories (Mingers & Willcocks, 2004). Other epistemological approaches do not value these resources in the same way. As mentioned, the more renowned approach to critical realism Bhaskar (1989) was considered. Politics reflects heavily within his philosophy. In comparison, Maxwell's (2012) approach is less political and more practical in its application to the development of new knowledge. It has been created specifically for qualitative research, making it accessible to this research. Critical realism (Maxwell, 2012) will be used as the epistemological approach.

2.5.2 Theoretical underpinning

As well as establishing an epistemological approach a theoretical underpinning needed to be found that would help the development of any new knowledge or theory generated. Ontologically, this would provide established constituents for knowledge development. Maxwell (2012) maintains that this does not need to be decided in the beginning. The researcher can reflect on what they consider might help. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on social development will be discussed, as well as other theories that were considered.

At the start of this research there were no theoretical frameworks available that explained children's use of mobile / internet devices. Therefore theories from within child psychology were explored. Woolgar (2009) says that researchers understand much about adults' use of mobile phones / internet devices. The range of materials is forever growing. However, he says, there is minimal in the

way of theoretical frameworks for making sense of it all. With regard to children's use of these devices and theoretical frameworks, this is certainly true.

Initially, Piaget's theory (1954) on cognitive development during middle childhood, a constructivist approach, was considered. Its focus on learning seemed too broad for the research. Next Turow's (2001) research on the internet and family boundaries was considered. The aim of his work is to provide a context for child development within the new media age. It focuses on family communications and monitoring. Initially, this seemed as if it might be suitable, but on further examination it was too broad, looking at a range of different social factors.

More recently, Livingstone et al. (2012) have created a framework, based on opportunities and risks associated with children's / young people's use of the internet. Their framework considers a wide range of different societal factors. It would not have been appropriate if it had been available at the start of the research, because again its focus is too broad for studying children's and parents' views in-depth. Within it there are additional frameworks. One framework considers how children / young people become skilled users of their devices; the different stages they go through and their associated behaviours. Hasebrink et al. (2011), in looking for patterns within their use, identified six skill clusters; one indicating the lowest skill set and the sixth indicating the highest skill set. This is an insightful framework, particularly with its comparison of skills across childhood, and may be helpful in future.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on children's social development was finally selected. It could illustrate children's use of their devices within different social contexts, emphasizing communications as well as relationships. Essentially, mobile phones are about communication and social relationships, thus Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory had the ingredients necessary for understanding new ideas about children's social development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory is based on different social contexts or settings, which keep the child and his /

her relationships in those settings at the forefront. Bronfenbrenner (1979) particularly focuses on children's social development in his book *The ecology of human development*. He perceives child development as a social process. There are three themes which Bronfenbrenner (1979) perceives as important to child development – the individual (child), family and community. Bronfenbrenner perceives there are social settings at five different levels (Table 2.3). A setting is a place where individuals readily engage socially. Social behaviours and relationships develop within those settings. The relevance of each setting depends on its meaning to the individual. He also believes that the developmental potential of a setting depends on the *supportiveness* shown to an individual within that setting. So not only does his theory provide a context for children's development, but also highlights the importance of social support within those settings. It could help not only for investigating children's behaviours with mobile / internet devices, but also in understanding the supportive role that parents might offer within those settings. Bronfenbrenner (1979) could offer important underpinning knowledge and different social contexts for understanding children's use of their devices. Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintains that child development takes place within the social context of family. Family functioning however takes place within a broader context. This context includes the other settings in which the family function, which are the child's immediate settings – home and school (settings 1), social links between home and school (settings 2), settings that affect the child's life but the child is essentially not part of (settings 3), and community, culture, economics and policies, all local and national (settings 4), and finally time - family development over time (settings 5) (Table 2.3). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on children's social development, with its different social settings, will provide important ontological constituents for critical realism, the epistemological approach (Maxwell, 2012) selected for the research.

Table 2.3***Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on children's social development.***

Bronfenbrenner's social settings:

1. Individual ties – family and friends;
2. Social ties between home and school;
3. Settings that affect the child's life but the child is not present, for example
Mother's work;
4. Social and cultural settings that affect the child's life – Government policies
and culture, for example;
5. Time.

2.6 Conclusions

Chapter 2 has explored the literature on children's (7 – 12 years) use of mobile / internet devices, as well as approaches to parenting and parent mediation. This chapter has primarily explored the best sources available in the UK, as well as looking beyond the UK, as these sources were initially limited within psychology. In conclusion, the literature review found that children had a growing interest in communicating via mobile phones particularly with internet access. Parents were involved in children's use, but they had some concerns about how to mediate this, particularly as children's use was becoming younger in the UK. Literature from other disciplines was consulted, to broaden the developing understanding.

Some of the evidence that currently exists tends to incorporate children's use of mobile / internet devices with that of young people's use. Middle years children are not focused on exclusively as a specific cohort. As children's interest in these

devices increases, they need to be studied as a separate cohort to help understand their social development at this time. Importantly too, children need to be given the opportunity to express their views about what these devices mean to them, so they will be given a voice within the research. The research will explore children's communications on these devices. Children's experiences are likely to reveal many different types of experience, but what is particularly of interest are their positive experiences. Independence (freedom) and identity (cool) play a key role in young people's use of these devices. They are important aspects of development within middle childhood too, but how they demonstrate themselves within children's use of mobile phones is uncertain. These issues will be explored specifically within the research. Evidence was presented on parents' mediation strategies. But more understanding is needed in this area, due to the increasing demands placed upon parents, as children's interest in mobile / internet devices grows, and parents' concerns continue. It is important to learn about the mobile phone within the parenting of middle years children.

The research will focus on children (7 – 12 years) as a specific cohort as young users of mobile / internet devices. Children's views and parents' views on children's (7- 12 years) use of these devices, particularly the mobile phone, will be investigated. Young people's perspectives will provide additional understanding. The next chapter will examine how the research was undertaken from a qualitative perspective.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

As chapter 2 describes, a qualitative approach was felt to be the most effective way to investigate participants' views on children's use of devices, so in-depth insights could be gained. Chapter 3 describes how the research was undertaken. Daly, Speedy and Jackson (2006) maintain that research is a process of enquiry which necessitates thoroughness. The methodology was thus carefully devised to allow close and thorough insights to emerge from participants' views.

3.2 Methodology and Methods

3.2.1 Research aims

An inductive approach was selected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), so participants' views formed the initial basis of research findings; children knew what their devices meant to them. It would have been inappropriate to adopt a deductive approach with an established line of enquiry from the outset. This would have restricted the research focus, particularly issues of interest to children. Research questions were thus developed in line with an inductive approach, to allow children's views to be heard (section 2.5), the development of specific aims then followed.

Formalisation of the aims were developed from two sources. Initially, issues of particular interest to me as the researcher; issues which I felt needed investigation. These were broad issues which would appear within participants'

discussions or could be drawn out as specific questions within focus groups and interviews. They included *parents' concerns* and *children as young users of their devices* (special cohort), which were social processes underlying interactions between parents and children (section 1.1). They were formalised as research aims. Secondly, specific issues discussed within literature review as needing investigation – *positive and negative communications, identity, freedom and independence*, all related to children, along with the *impact of parenting* on children's device use (see section 2.5). These issues were originally identified through discussion with participants as important to them, and then related to literature within the literature review. They were all formalised as research aims too. The aims are outlined below. All the aims relate to child development, and are important for psychologists to understand at this time. The aims link to specific research questions (Q1 or Q2), which can be identified at the end of each aim.

- I. Develop an understanding about middle years children's (7 - 12 years) use of mobile phones and internet devices, particularly about their *communications (positive, negative, and identity related)* along with their *independent behaviours*, as a special cohort of children (Q1).
- II. Develop an understanding about children's use of these devices from children themselves, so that their voices are heard and understood (Q1).
- III. Establish what is unique about children's use of mobile / internet devices by making comparisons with young people's use, through an exploration of their views and theories (Q1).
- IV. Create knowledge about the views of parents on children and their devices, particularly their *approach to parenting and mediation strategies* (Q2).

- V. *Parents concerns* feature throughout literature on children's / young people's use of communication technologies. Develop an understanding on parents' concerns about this cohort of children as *young users* new to mobile phones (Q2).

These aims have been created to help guide the research in its investigation of the research questions. The aims will be achieved by exploring participants' views through focus groups and interviews.

3.2.2 Qualitative Research: Design

Qualitative approaches are designed to explore depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). They allow the researcher to develop a closeness to participants' meanings. However, it was not the first approach considered, as the following illustrates. Ideas changed and developed as the research design unfolded.

Initially, a quantitative study using mixed methods was proposed, looking primarily at parents' views about children's use of mobile / internet devices. Children's views were also going to be included, but only in a very minimal way. However, after some initial work this seemed rather limiting in terms of what was going to be meaningful about children and their devices. Focusing more specifically on children's views would provide much closer insights into their realities. Further, by using a qualitative methodology, inductively, it would allow children to express their views.

Previously, whilst working as a children's nurse, I had wanted to undertake research directly with children, but this had not been possible. The utmost care has to be taken when researching with children (Alderson & Morrow, 2004, 2011), as they are perceived as young, vulnerable, and need protecting. Following the initial ethics submission, permission was granted to explore their views. Children's views therefore became the main research focus, rather than parents' views.

When trying to understand child development researchers frequently work closely with parents; asking them about their children's behaviour (Haghish & Teymoori, 2013). However, here was an opportunity to work directly with children themselves, to find out their thoughts through qualitative research.

Braun & Clarke (2006, 2013) maintain that more can be gained by using a qualitative approach, particularly where the researcher is interested in investigating meanings, as here. Children's use of mobile / internet devices was a new behaviour for them; therefore using a qualitative methodology would allow their thoughts and ideas to emerge.

When using a quantitative methodology the researcher has a predetermined focus (Parahoo, 2006; Bryman, 2012). This would limit what children could say. Using a qualitative approach however would allow children themselves to demonstrate what was important to them about their mobile / internet communications. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state what is relevant is then allowed to emerge for itself. As discussed, there was little established information available on children's views about their mobile devices, certainly at the beginning of the research. It was important in answering the research questions that I developed closeness to children's views. By not imposing limits on what children were able to say, a closeness might develop, which may reveal both interesting and original insights into their behaviour.

Having not undertaken qualitative research previously, initially I explored different qualitative approaches, before settling on a particular one that could be used alongside critical realism. For example Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bryant & Charmaz, 2010) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2011) helped to inform my understandings initially. Of these two approaches I thought that IPA would be suitable, but on further exploration found that this approach would be difficult to use with children. IPA requires participants to reflect upon their experiences. Children can find this difficult, as they have a limited capacity to reflect, particularly

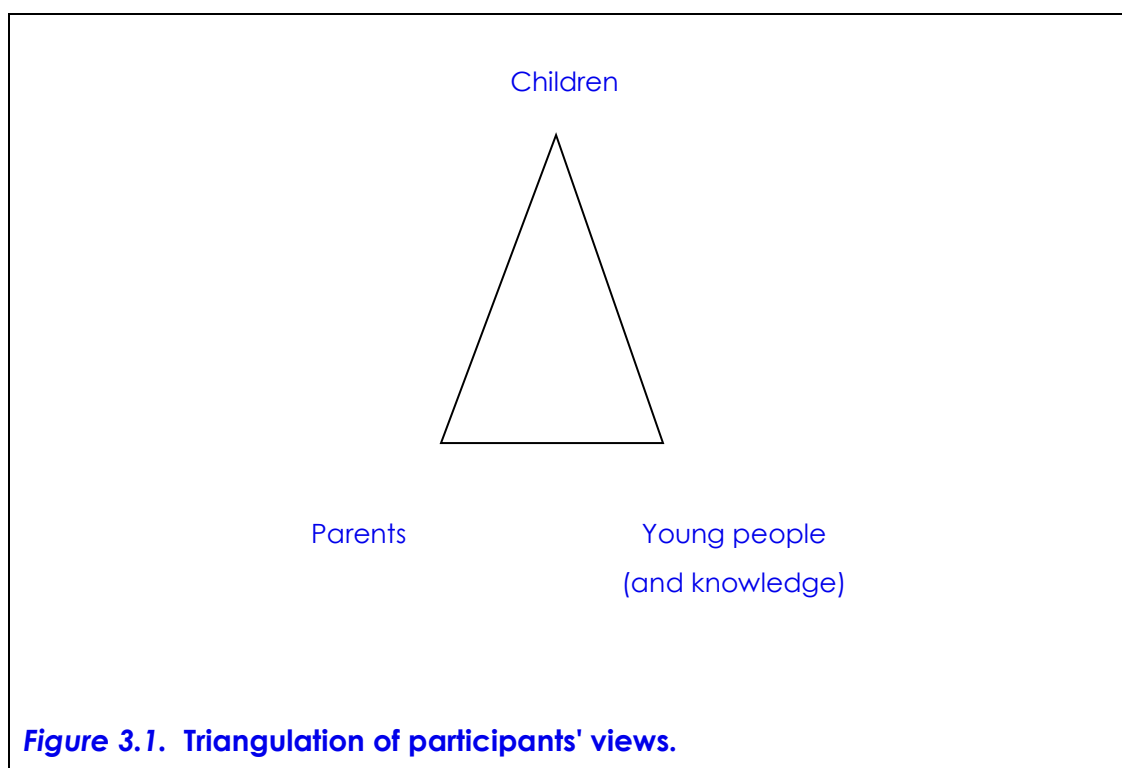
young children. Further, there was an epistemological conflict between IPA and critical realism, which meant they could not be used together, as their beliefs about developing knowledge are different. IPA does not view existing knowledge in the same way that critical realism does.

Braun's and Clarke's (2006, 2013) approach to thematic analysis was finally selected to use alongside critical realism. Importantly for the research thematic analysis is considered to be a useful approach to adopt where there is limited existing knowledge; as here with children's views on using their mobile devices from a depth perspective. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) assert that any epistemological approach can be used with thematic analysis. Critical realism (Maxwell, 2012) could be used alongside thematic analysis without difficulty. By using thematic analysis, it took away any epistemological conflict that might have existed between IPA and critical realism.

Personally, what also attracted me to thematic analysis was that it provided a skills-based approach to qualitative research. As a novice researcher, new to the field of qualitative research, I would find this helpful. Thematic analysis is a method that is used for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Thematic analysis however is not without its critics. Smith and Firth (2011), for example, describe it as being a rather superficial approach to qualitative research. Nonetheless, other researchers consider that it provides helpful steps towards analysis, as well as essential skills (Liamputtong, 2009; Fielden, Sillence & Little, 2011).

Epistemologically, Maxwell (2012) states that critical realism uses participants' realities and existing knowledge as combined resources for informing research. Participants' realities and theory would help inform children's meanings about mobile / internet devices. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) would be used to analyze those realities, with established knowledge incorporated as needed, particularly from young people as comparative evidence.

Triangulation was selected as the research design. Triangulation is the process of combining two or more research strategies (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Burns & Grove, 2011). Triangulation was used in two ways. The first was *data triangulation* and the second was *method triangulation*. Data triangulation is the application of two or more data sources to examine the same phenomenon (Dyson & Brown, 2006; Burns & Grove, 2011). The views of different participants were accessed to capture different realities (data triangulation). Children's views, as discussed, were essential. By introducing the views of others this helped to provide additional perspectives associated with children's views. As highlighted earlier, parents play a key role in children's lives during middle childhood (Tassoni, 2007; Collins et al., 2012) therefore it was important to include their views. Further, young people had important views to offer. They were the earliest users of these devices; the Net generation (Tapscott, 1999). These different realities would be compared with children's realities (Figure 3.1), to highlight differences and demonstrate the uniqueness of children's development.



It was anticipated that some participants' views may be similar or different compared to children's views (Kimchi, Polivka & Stevenson, 1991; Breitmayer, Ayres & Knafl, 1993). Further, children themselves may hold different views based upon their experiences. By exploring these different views an enriched understanding would be created, as Tobin and Begley (2004) suggest can be achieved through triangulation.

Not all researchers agree that triangulation has value in this way. For example Sim and Sharpe (1998) believe that by using data triangulation the researcher can over complicate the research, and suggest a single data source may be more appropriate. This seemed rather limiting for the research. A single data source would provide a narrow perspective. Other participants (parents) were invested in children's use of these devices; not just children. Further, by being able to compare children's realities, to the realities of others (young people), a more insightful understanding of children's realities could be achieved. Nonetheless, it would need to be undertaken carefully, so not to over complicate the research.

Method triangulation was also incorporated within the design. Method triangulation involves using different research methods to obtain data (Burns & Grove, 2011). Two different research methods, small focus group interviews and individual interviews, were used to explore participants' views. By using these different research methods it would enable children's views particularly, to be drawn out in different ways. For example Kvale (1996), and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) maintain that individual interviews are able to provide deeper insights than might be obtained from other research methods. Small focus group interviews meanwhile can provide varied views from different participants interviewed together (Krueger, 1994; Krueger & Casey, 2009). Children would respond in different ways, whether interviewed individually or together in groups. Horner (2000) advises that sometimes it can be intimidating for children to speak in groups, whereas they may feel more comfortable talking alone in an interview. Conversely, other children may feel more comfortable talking together with their

friends in group, stimulating one another's thinking (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Greig, Taylor & Mackay, 2007, 2013). There were advantages for the research in using both these research methods to access children's thinking. By incorporating method triangulation along with data triangulation, participants' realities could be accessed in different ways.

3.2.3 Reflexivity

Another important aspect of the design was reflexivity. This forms a fundamental part of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). When using reflection the researcher needs to acknowledge their own views. For me this involved considering and acknowledging my own thoughts and feelings about participants' views, existing knowledge, and developing knowledge within the research. Different theories on reflection were considered to help with this, such as Etherington (2004), along with Fook and Gardener (2007). After much consideration Schön's (1983, 2011) ideas on reflection were applied. His approach is commonly used within education, where I had first encountered it. Schön's (1983, 2011) approach involves thinking questioningly and systematically about issues, so a greater understanding can be developed. Schön's (1983, 2011) systematic approach had previously taught me to think about a situation, consider my own thoughts and feelings, consider relevant theories, analyze these perspectives, and then draw conclusions. I had previously applied Schön's (1983, 2011) approach in practice and research, where it had been helpful.

A reflexive analysis is one which respects that different meanings can be brought to the research (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 2006). Using reflection I felt would help provide a greater understanding about children's use of their devices. Maxwell (2012) asserts that through reflection, as part of critical realism, the researcher needs to think carefully about how they interact with their participants, as the next section discusses.

3.2.4 Participants

Probability sampling is undertaken frequently within research. Participants are selected on a random basis, so that a cross section of the population are represented within the research. Non-probability sampling however is frequently undertaken within qualitative research (Burns & Grove, 2011). Participants are selected in terms of their characteristics; the specific characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying (Parker, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Participant selection was thus essential to the design. The sample needed to be purposive, using a specific selection criteria, to gain access to relevant participants. The criteria for inclusion consisted of middle years children and their parents. Targeted were children who used mobile / internet devices regularly, but not all children needed to be regular users as their perspectives would be valuable too. Parents targeted were those who wanted to talk about their children using these devices. Young people / young adults were later targeted, who would provide insights into their use of devices. Different generations of participants were thus deliberately selected for the research, so that a broad perspective could be used to investigate children and devices, as a way of understanding from a triangulated perspective, in line with the research design. Thus the sample was not homogenous.

A disadvantage of purposive sampling is that the findings could not be generalized to the population as a whole. The findings could only be discussed in terms that relate to this cohort of children, parents and young people who participated. This was not a problem for the research as it was exploratory; gaining insights only.

The sample of children who participated were all middle years children, 7 – 12 years. However, they had different levels of skill with devices. Some were very experienced, whilst others less so as they did not own a mobile device. All children had experience of using a smartphone, even if it was not their own. It

was important to have participants with different experiences, which might reflect within itself differences between middle years children, providing a broad perspective on middle childhood.

3.2.4.1 Children

Children between the ages of 7 - 12 years (middle childhood) were recruited for focus groups interviews and individual interviews. Children were mainly recruited from one private school in the Midlands known to me. Additional children were recruited via individual contact in the Midlands and the South West of England. These areas were chosen based upon my location at different stages of the research.

Originally, children 8 – 11 years were selected for the study. However, by not including 7 and 12 year olds, both at the extreme ends of middle childhood, some important findings might be missed. From observation 7 year olds were using mobile devices in the form of the Nintendo ds (games console). Even though it was not a mobile phone it could still provide important information on their communication behaviours, with its links to the internet. Further, 12 year olds were not teenagers, but were becoming more independent, and thus could provide important details about how they were developing independent behaviours during middle childhood. As Collins et al. (2012) point out middle years is an interesting time, with different behaviours emerging. The following sections will provide details about participants.

Overall, 35 children participated (including pilot studies), comprising of a mixture of boys and girls. Their backgrounds varied; with some coming from quite affluent backgrounds, others less so. The majority of children were aged between 9 - 10 years (22 children). A small number of younger children participated, despite more being invited; two 7 year old boys and two 8 year old girls. To gain further insights into the behaviours of these younger aged children, parents were asked for their opinions, which as discussed earlier is the more usual

way to access children's views. Parents of three 7 year old boys and three 7 / 8 year old girls shared their views. Where younger children did participate in the research they demonstrated concentration difficulties. It can be difficult for young children to participate in research (Alderson & Morrow, 2004, 2011), which will be reviewed further in chapter 8.

Small focus group interviews with children were undertaken (one pilot and three research groups). The research groups comprised of one girls' group, one boys' group and a mixed group. All children in each group knew one another, which Kitzinger (1994) maintains can ease conversation. Children who participated were aged from 8 to 10 years. The size of each focus group varied, ranging from three (girls' group), five (boys' group) and one larger group comprising of 10 (mixed group) participants. Individual interviews were undertaken with 12 children (one pilot interview and 11 research interviews). Their ages ranged from 7 years through to 12 years. The children were already known to me. Parker (2006) maintains that this can be helpful, as it can help conversations flow more easily between interviewer and interviewee.

Within the focus groups and interviews all children had access to the internet and a mobile phone. Five of the 18 children who participated in the focus groups did not have access to their own mobile phone. Within the 11 research interviews undertaken, four children did not have access to their own mobile phone. The ages of non-mobile phone owners varied across the sample.

When undertaking research with children gatekeepers play a significant role (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). They provide permission for the researcher to access children, but always acting in the best interests of children themselves. Permissions were sought with gatekeepers before any actual contact with children was made. This involved talking with their parents, teachers and the university (Ethics Committee). Information was provided for them about the research so they could determine if it was appropriate to be undertaken with children. Gatekeepers were also sometimes present during focus groups and

interviews. Where children participated in the school setting, as happened with the boys' focus group and the mixed children's focus group, a teacher was present. Parents were sometimes present when their children were interviewed individually.

Reflecting on this, it can be difficult having gatekeepers present when interviewing children. Potentially, they can influence what children say and do not say; giving rise to what is known within research as the power relationship (Alderson & Morrow, 2004, 2011; BPS, 2010). Children are aware of gatekeepers' views, and might feel they have to speak in accordance with those views rather than speak freely. One of the aims of this research was to facilitate focus groups and interviews in such a way that permitted children to have voice. Within the school setting the focus groups were not allowed to go ahead without the presence of a gatekeeper – the teacher. However, to try and overcome any potential problems associated with the power relationship in this situation, both the teacher and myself stressed to children that the research was interested in finding out their thoughts. We encouraged children to speak as freely as possible.

Parents' presence within the individual interviews was a little less straight forward. In the school setting there was no choice, however within the home setting there might be. I discussed the dilemma of having parents present within children's interviews with other researchers. I wanted children to feel safe during the interview, which for them might mean having a parent present, as Al-Hamdan and Anthony (2010) advocate. Yet, this could potentially detract from children speaking freely. After much deliberation I decided to offer parents and children the choice; for children in conjunction with their parents to decide for themselves. If parents were present, as the interviewer it was going to be important for me to be vigilant to their potential influence on children's talk. A strategy I adopted to overcome this was to ask the same question a second time, later in an interview when the situation might be more relaxed, where I thought a parent had been influential. This helped me to see if the response was

the same or more detail could be provided. The impact of having parents present within children's interviews will be reviewed further in chapter 8.

On reflection, communicating with children was considered carefully within the different interviews. It was important that children felt happy to talk. I communicated with them in an age-appropriate way; using appropriate language and taking an interest in objects and activities that interested them. Further, listening carefully to what they had to say without interruption or judgement. Most children were happy to talk and some had a lot to say.

3.2.4.2 Parents

Parents were recruited for focus group interviews. Participating parents came from the Midlands. Both mothers and fathers participated, although in the main the majority of participating parents were mothers. Parents needed to have at least one child aged between 7 - 12 years, which they all did. Parents themselves were aged between 35 - 50 years of age.

Groups of parents, who knew each other already, were invited. The purpose of this was to help parents feel relaxed talking together. In all five parent focus groups were undertaken (one pilot group, four research groups). Numbers in the focus groups were smaller than intended, around four or five participants on average, as some parents did not turn up. As Krueger and Casey (2009) state smaller focus groups are becoming generally more common. Despite the small numbers, the focus groups worked well. Disappointingly, data from one research focus group could not be used as the group did not give permission for their discussion to be tape recorded. Analysis without their tape recording would have been inaccurate, so unfortunately exclusion resulted. In all approximately 35 parents participated. Most came from the parents' focus groups, whilst others joined the research when their children were interviewed individually. Some parents from young people's focus groups also participated.

3.2.4.3 Young people / young adults

Young people / young adults were recruited to find out their ideas on using mobile / internet devices, for comparative purposes with children's use. Young people were recruited from individual direct contact, while young adults were recruited from a Midlands University. All were personally invited to participate.

Focus groups were undertaken, with each group differing in age. The first group comprised of 14 - 16 year olds, the second group 19 - 21 year olds, and the final group 23 - 30 year olds (young adults). In total eight young people / young adults participated. The criterion for inclusion of young people / young adults was that they needed to be users of mobile / internet devices. All were experienced users of these devices. These groups were not homogenous. Young people / young adults of different ages were deliberately selected, so an understanding about their patterns of use and skills with devices, based upon their age, could be ascertained. This would assist in comparisons with children's use, particularly helping to understand how device use changes with age.

As the interviewer I felt it was important to be sensitive to the developmental differences between young people / young adults within each of these different groups, which is advised (see Alderson & Morrow, 2004, 2011). To achieve this I read about the developmental and cultural norms for each of the age groups. Further, a pilot focus group was undertaken, so I could gain insights into young people's behaviours within the interview setting. Following the pilot interview I asked young people (14 – 15 years) for interview feedback. They felt that I had treated them with respect, in relation to their age, knowledge about devices, as well as communication and behavioural norms for their age.

On reflection, in relation to the groups themselves, some of them were undertaken more as family groups (Krueger & Casey, 2009), rather than traditional focus groups. Other members of the family wanted to join in, as they had opinions to offer. Consents were thus obtained for them too. The number of

young people / young adults who attended these groups was small, so including the contributions of other family members was helpful for discussion. Further, as a children's nurse I had experience of undertaking health interviews with families, so it was possible to draw on these skills when interviewing everyone.

3.2.4.4 Further details about participants

To protect the identities of all participants no real names were used; all participants were given pseudonyms. Tables 3.1- 3.5 provide background details associated with some of the children, young people / young adults and parents who took part in the research. Details are not provided for all those who participated, just the main participants who feature within the findings chapters. The tables also show relevant demographic details associated with these participants. Demographic details were used to help determine if there were any particular patterns associated with participants within the findings (Barbour, 2008) and to further understand the social context of participants.

Table 3.1				
<i>Participants in children's focus groups.</i>				
Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Situation in the family	School
Fiona	10 years	Girl	Eldest of 2 children	Private school
Gareth	9 years	Boy	Youngest of 2 children	Private school
Holly	9 years	Girl	Only child	Private school
Jack	10 years	Boy	Youngest of 3 children	Private school
Nicky	9 years	Girl	Only child	Private school
Rachel	9 years	Girl	Eldest of 3 children	State school

Table 3.2***Participants in children's interviews.***

Interview (Pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Situation in the Family	School
1 Janie	12 years	Girl	Middle child of 3 children	State school
2 Greig	11 years	Boy	Only child	Private school
3 Will	11 years	Boy	Only child	State school
4 Zac	11 years	Boy	Eldest of 3 children	Private school
5 Billy	10 years	Boy	Middle child of 3 children	Private school
6 Vanessa	12 years	Girl	Youngest of 3 children	State school
7 Lilly-Mae	9 years	Girl	Eldest of 2 children	Private school
8 Leah	10 years	Girl	Twin	State school
9 Tee	10years	Girl	Eldest of 2 children	State school
10 Freddie	7 years	Boy	Only child	State school
11 Naomi	9 years	Girl	Only child	State school

Table 3.3*Children who feature within the parent focus groups.*

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Situation in the family	School
Ed	7 years	Boy	Youngest of 2 children	Private school
Lucy	10 years	Girl	Eldest of 2 children	Private school
Johnny	11 years	Boy	Eldest of 2 children	Private school

Table 3.4*Some of the young people / young adults who participated in the focus groups.*

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Situation in the family	Situation
Natalie	16 years	Female	Eldest of 3 children	State school
Maggie	19 years	Female	Youngest of 2 children	Undergraduate, living away from home
Gavin	21 years	Male	Eldest of 2 children	Undergraduate, living away from home
Mike	30 years	Male	Eldest of 2 children	Postgraduate, living with partner

Table 3.5***Parents who feature in their children's interviews.***

Interview (pseudonym)	Age	Family	Employment
2 Greig's mother	35 years	One child	Employed full-time
3 Will's father	45 years	One child	Employed as a senior school teacher full-time
4 Zac's mother	40 years	3 children	Not employed
7 Lilly-Mae's mother	40 years	2 children	Employed part-time

On reflection, when working with all these different groups of participants, as the researcher I needed to think carefully about how I interacted with them.

Maxwell (2012) mentions how important it is to recognize their personal qualities and realities that exist within their social worlds. As the researcher I encouraged and supported them to say what they thought about the research focus. I took care not to say anything that would offend their views. This approach seemed successful as all participants engaged with the research, and some children even wrote and thanked me for providing them with the opportunity to talk about their devices.

3.2.5 Research Process

The following section outlines the research process. The focus will be access, ethics, methods, and data collection.

3.2.5.1 Access to participants and Ethical principles

3.2.5.1.1 Access

Before access to participants could actually be undertaken a number of conditions had to be put place, as well as considering important ethical principles in-depth. The purpose was to help ensure participants safety and comfort.

As highlighted, a local private school was asked to join the research. Initially, I met with the Headmaster to discuss the research and asked his permission for the school's participation, which he provided (Headmaster's letter, Appendix 1). In addition, I joined a teachers' meeting to discuss how the school might be involved and to seek teachers' ideas for children's focus groups.

Participant information sheets were developed, which included research invitations, details about the purpose of the research, and role of participants. They were developed individually according to the specific needs of each group (children, young people, young adults and parent groups). Details on participant information for the children's interviews, as an example, can be found in Appendix 2. The material for all groups was reviewed by the University of Lincoln, School of Psychology Ethics Committee, and found to meet with their requirements.

Following completion of participant information, participants could then be recruited. Parents were recruited via contacts within the school or approached individually. Children were recruited from the school and through contact with their parents. Participant information sheets and consent forms were sent to all interested families. Consents forms were included for parents and children. Parents needed to provide written consent for their child to participate in the research (BPS, 2010, 2014), if their child wished to do so.

Young people / young adults were invited to participate. With young people their parents were also contacted. Written details about the research were provided for all participants. These parents were also invited to participate in a young person's focus group, if they were interested and their child was happy for them to do so. Appropriate consent forms were thus included.

Young people are able to provide their own consent, in conjunction with their parents depending upon age. Children under 16 years require parental consent, which is the legal position in the UK (BPS, 2010). Consents were therefore provided by young people themselves, and parents also provided consent for them, in some situations, depending upon age.

Specific training and checks needed to be undertaken, so that I could work with children / young people. This included a Criminal Records Bureau check to ensure that I was safe to work with them, which the BPS (2010) advises. Interview training involved attending a session on interviewing, reading relevant texts and undertaking pilot sessions to help develop my interview skills.

3.2.5.1.2 Ethical principles

Ethical principles were carefully considered throughout the research process. They are essential to consider when working closely with participants, both for their safety and comfort. Beauchamp's and Childress' (2008, 2013) principles of ethics were applied throughout – *autonomy, nonmaleficence and beneficence, justice and maintaining a professional relationship*. Incorporating ethical principles into the research was one of the earliest considerations; particularly as great care had to be taken to ensure children's safety because of their perceived vulnerability (Alderson & Morrow, 2004, 2011). Beauchamp's and Childress' (2008, 2013) approach has a medical basis, but having used it previously and found it helpful, it could be appropriately applied within this research. Further, the BPS's (2010) ethical guidelines were consulted, and helped to reinforce points, particularly on children's role within research.

How these ethical principles (Beauchamp & Childress, 2008, 2013) were applied within this research is discussed. *Autonomy* – the researcher needs to recognize participants' rights to decide for themselves about aspects of the research that affect them. This importantly includes if they wish to participate or not. Carefully worded explanations about the research were therefore provided for all participants, so they could decide for themselves if they wanted to participate and what participation would mean. In relation to children this was slightly more involved. Children needed to know what participation would involve. As their gatekeepers, both parents and teachers were able to explain to children about the research. Children who expressed an interest were then provided with further information (verbally and in writing).

It was explained to all participants that they could choose to participate or not. Participants have the right to withdraw from research too, after they have initially provided their consent (Twycross, 2009; BPS, 2010, 2014). All participants were advised of this right. With children this required careful explanation, undertaken in an age-appropriate way.

As well as the important considerations around participation, there were practical decisions to think about too, such as participants' comfort during interviews, particularly for children. For example, during the process of participating in an interview, children might want to take a break. I wanted them to feel that they could do this without feeling apprehensive about asking. To assist children in making this decision, I developed some interactive cards. I was aware that some children might find it difficult to articulate their wish; therefore I developed a set of traffic light cards. This enabled children to indicate if they wished to stop at any point during the interview, and if and when they were ready to start again. The idea was developed from Alderson and Morrow (2004, 2011), who discuss how to make the research process more friendly for children, and thus allowing children autonomy within research.

Nonmaleficence and *Beneficence* were also considered. Beauchamp and Childress (2008, 2013) talk about ensuring that research does not cause harm, but creates good in terms of providing benefits. Fundamentally, the research was about doing good by finding out information on contemporary child development which might benefit children, parents and psychologists. Further, at a more practical level, it was also about not causing harm. This meant not causing participants any distress through participation. Therefore, both the physical and psychologically environment for interviews needed to be addressed. This included making sure participants felt comfortable to talk with others in their focus group, and the physical environment itself needed to be conducive to discussion, by paying attention to seating and availability of refreshments.

Justice is about being fair with participants (Beauchamp & Childress, 2008, 2013). To be fair meant to be honest about what was required. This included meeting with all participants prior to focus groups and interviews, so that they had the opportunity to ask questions and knew who was coming to talk with them. For example, I joined the class of children, where many had volunteered to participate, and discussed the research with them. Further, I developed participant information that was cognitively age-appropriate. With children this information could either be read by them or in conjunction with their parents.

In relation to young people (14 - 21 years) I felt being fair was about respecting their opinions and not being judgemental (Taylor & Muller, 1995; Steinberg & Silk, 2012). Young people were beginning to develop their own opinions and wanted to share them, so it was especially important to respect what they had to say. I felt I was learning from them about mobile / internet devices, and viewed them as *experts*.

The final principle was *developing and maintaining a professional relationship* (Beauchamp & Childress, 2008, 2013). My relationship with participants was a

professional one. Epistemologically, critical realism (2012) believes the researcher must be respectful, as participants are sharing their social worlds. I was aware when talking with them that they were discussing matters that were important to them. I needed to be respectful about what they had to say.

Beauchamp's and Childress' (2008, 2013) ethical principles were applied throughout the research process. They were not difficult to apply. When working with others however, it can sometimes be difficult for those who are not directly involved within research to understand their significance. For example, the school involved was supportive, but one teacher felt that all children in her class should participate. I had to explain that participation was voluntary, and if children did not wish to participate they had the right to decide not to; it was their choice. No incentives were offered to participants, but a small gift was organised for all involved. This is recommended by the BPS (2010) as participants are giving of their time, so should thus be rewarded.

Prior to meeting with any potential participants submissions were made to the University of Lincoln, School of Psychology Ethics Committee, outlining my plans for the research. A second application was later made to the committee due to changes in the research design; changing from a quantitative mixed methods study to a qualitative one.

3.2.5.2 Methods

Small focus group interviews and individual interviews were selected as the research methods for discussing children's use of mobile / internet devices. Small focus groups were used with all participants, while individual interviews were also used with children. As discussed, parents were also invited to participate within children's individual interviews, if they wished. This was negotiated individually with families.

Content for each of the focus group interviews was derived from ideas developed from reading different sources on children's / young people's use of mobile / internet devices, as well as observing children's behaviours. Particular books, reports and articles that were useful included Plant (2000), Byron (2008), and Livingstone and Brake (2010). Plant (2000) was useful for questions related to young people, Byron (2008) helped with questions on children's safety both within children's and parents' interview schedules. Livingstone's and Brake's (2010) article helped with children's communications, particularly social networking.

It was important for the research that participants talked about what was salient to them. However, prompts and probes were also incorporated to help ensure the participants remained focused on the research subject, and to find out detail on particular points raised. Denscombe (2014) says prompts and probes can be used to help spur on the conversation in relevant directions.

3.2.5.2.1 Focus group interviews – parents and young people / young adults

Focus groups are described as interactions between researcher and participants for the purpose of collecting data on a specific topic (Krueger, 1994, Krueger & Casey, 2009). Focus groups are able to provide views on a range of issues (Carey, 1994; Asbury, 1995; Coté Arsenault & Morrison Beedy, 1999). They were initially selected as development tools for questionnaires, as part of the mixed methods approach. However on reflection, when I saw how well focus groups were able to gather data, I felt they would be more valuable than questionnaires as a research tool.

Focus groups were selected so that participants could discuss their views on together in a safe environment, which Carey (1994) advocates. In addition, the process would allow me to understand their views more fully, by joining in with their discussions. Interaction is central to focus group data (Ashbury, 1995; Sim,

1998; Webb & Kevern, 2001). Through participants' interactions large data sources are encouraged (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). A disadvantage of this method however, is that evidence cannot be projected onto the population as a whole (Nyamathi & Shuler, 1990). But this was not necessary as the research was simply exploring participants' perspectives.

There are different ways questioning can be undertaken in focus groups. Krueger (1998a) suggests using questions in two ways, either through the template format or the topic guide format. Both formats were used within focus groups, to help me learn about different ways of undertaking them. Ideas on question content for parents' focus groups were developed from my own observations, reading around children's use of mobile / internet devices, and parents' concerns. As a parent myself and the context I was in at the time, a mother of an eight year old child, influenced this. At the school she attended (the school which features within this research) there was a sense of great interest from children about these devices and many questions from parents. Parents were happy to allow their children to have mobile phones, particularly for reasons of safety, but beyond this they seemed to understand very little about children's use of them; generating concern.

Initially, a template format was selected for parents' focus groups. With this format questions come up in conversation, providing an informal approach to focus group discussion. The questions are set within conversational sentences (Krueger, 1998a). Parents were asked what they thought about children's use of mobile / internet devices. Table 3.6 provides an example of some of the questions.

The actual design of the template required careful thought. Krueger (1998a) suggests early questions should put participants at their ease. The template was divided into several sections – *opening*, *introduction*, *key questions* and *concluding items*, as suggested by Krueger (1998a). The purpose of this format was to help the focus group flow; ensuring that questions were logical in order

and that the most important questions came early on, so no important questions were missed. A final question was called *anything missed?* The purpose of this question was to allow participants to raise any points that had not been mentioned, which they might feel needed discussing.

Table 3.6

Parents' focus group questions (template format).

Introductory questions

- General question
- What are your experiences of children using email?
- What are your thoughts about children using mobile phones?

Key questions

- What advice do you think parents need to be giving their children about use of mobile phones? (safety)
- What issues do parents need to be thinking about regarding children's use of the internet? (internet / email / Facebook)
- What questions could I ask children about their mobile phone and internet use?
- Any points I need to consider in relation to encouraging children's interest in this research?

Closure

- Of all the things that we have discussed, what would you say is the most important in relation to children's use of mobile phones and the internet?
- Have we left anything major out (anything missed)?
- Thank you.

All these questions were set within conversations undertaken within the focus groups. Prompts are in brackets. Probes – ask for examples, details, and clarification, as needed.

Prior to use the template was checked by two other researchers. They suggested a few minor modifications. As the template seemed a little lengthy, it

was necessary to reduce the number of questions used. A pilot group with four parents was undertaken. They were asked not only to respond to questions included in the template, but comment on the focus group process. As the moderator of the focus group, I wanted to ensure that this process was undertaken appropriately. Krueger (1998b) maintains the role of moderator helps to ensure that group processes come together, which I worked hard to achieve. Pilot group parents reported they found the process informative and felt that children's use of mobile / internet devices was a very topical subject for UK parents at this time. One parent commented that more details needed to be provided about the research itself. These comments were duly noted for future reference.

Reflecting on parent focus groups, prompts were useful to help ensure that discussions did not go off focus. I wanted parents to talk about what mattered to them, but at the same time I was aware that when parents get together they can talk about all sort of things. In the event prompts helped, particularly within one parent focus group where a mother insisted on dominating the conversation. The use of prompts enabled the group to get back on track, and provide other mothers with the opportunity to talk.

After undertaking three parent research focus groups the format was changed. The template format was not used; instead the topic guide format was selected. The purpose of this was for me to become familiar with using an even more informal approach to questioning. Now that I was becoming more confident with focus group processes and knowledgeable about children's devices, I felt I could be more flexible in my interview technique. The topic guide approach seemed a more favourable option at this stage (Table 3.7). Krueger (1998a) describes the topic guide as simply a list of topics to be discussed. The template format in comparison was more structured; using set questions. The more relaxed approach of the topic guide format worked well and was applied to young people's / young adults' focus groups and children's focus groups too, allowing more flexibility by not using set questions in a fixed format.

Table 3.7***Parents' focus group questions (topic guide format).***

Introduction to the research

- Experiences of their children using mobile phones.
- Experiences of their children using the internet. (Any worries?)
- Advice parents need to be giving their children about these devices?
- Factors important regarding children having access to – mobile phones, email, internet, social networking sites? (Safety)
- Summarized points
- Most significant issue discussed (individual)
- Anything forgotten / Anything wish to add
- Thank you

Prompts are in brackets. Probes – ask for examples, details, and clarification, where relevant.

The topic guide format, used within young people's focus groups, consisted of a schedule with points about their use of mobile / internet devices and also what they thought about children's current use of these devices. Table 3.8 provides an example of a schedule used. Epistemologically, it was also going to be important to consider theoretical perspectives on young people's / young adults' use, as discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.2), which would need to be carefully integrated within the findings.

Table 3.8***Young people's / young adults' focus group schedule.***

- Introduction to the research (children's current use)
- Thinking about your first mobile phone, how old were you when it was first bought?
- Why did you get the mobile phone and what did you use it for?
- How does your use now compare with your use then?
- When did you first start using the internet?
- How does your use of the internet now compare with your use then?
- Children's use – what do you think about children using mobile phones and the internet?
- Anything missed?
- Conclusion – summary and thanks.

Prompts are in brackets. Probes – ask for examples, details, and clarification, where relevant.

The young people's schedule was seen by two other researchers for comment before use; no changes were required. However, in line with comments received from the ethics committee, all documentation was amended to include the term *young adults*, as well as *young people*. A pilot focus group was undertaken with young people, where they were asked about the focus group process. They commented that sensitivity was shown towards the different situations they described.

Within the young people's / young adults' focus groups prompts were particularly useful too. On reflection, for example in the young adults' focus group, participants' were slow to start talking initially, even though they all knew each other. To help generate thinking and talking, I provided them with insights into some current perspectives on how children and their parents interact with

mobile / internet devices. I asked them to think back to their use as young people. At which point they eagerly made comparisons and identified their own thoughts about children's behaviours with devices currently. The prompting had been helpful.

3.2.5.2.2 Children's focus group interviews

Focus groups were chosen to explore children's views to gain breadth on the research focus. Individual interviews were later selected to gain depth perspectives (Kvale, 1996, Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). These two different research methods would be able to access information from children in different ways. As Tobin and Begley (2004) maintain triangulation of methods, where two or more methods are used for collecting data, can provide different insights. It was hoped that focus groups would provide insights into a number of different issues, whilst the interviews would provide depth on selected issues that were identified through the focus groups, as needing further exploration.

Horner (2000) has studied the use of focus groups with middle years children and found them to be an appropriate method to use because they encourage children to actively participate; children feel that their opinions matter. Secondly, developmentally they are appropriate because children have both the cognitive and communication skills to participate fully (Horner, 2000). Focus groups were therefore a suitable method to use with this age group and the subject matter one that they were likely to be interested in.

Children can generate a variety of ideas through interaction in focus groups (Heary & Hennessy, 2006). However, Mitchell (1999) warns against using focus groups as the only method with children. She points out that some children may not respond well, and individual interviews may be a better method for them. On the whole most children participated well within the focus groups with a few exceptions. Within each of the focus groups warm up games were included to help children feel relaxed and ready to participate. Early, Cushway and Cassidy

(2007) recommend their use. On reflection the games were helpful for encouraging interaction.

As mentioned, the topic guide format (Krueger, 1998a) was used, helping to keep questions short and simple, with no long questions for children to think about. A schedule containing points for discussion was developed, focusing on children's use of mobile / internet devices. Table 3.9 provides an example of this schedule.

Table 3.9

Children's focus group schedule.

- Definition of terms – communication technologies / devices.
- Introduction – fun activities, ground rules, informal questions
- Mobile phone use (texts, phone calls)
- Future mobile phone use (social networking)
- Internet use – (email and other uses)
- Use of other communication technologies – different devices and ways of communicating (ds)
- What do your parents think?
- What is the most important thing we have talked about?
- Conclusion – including summary and thanks.

Prompts are in brackets. Probes – ask for examples, details, and clarification, where relevant.

On reflection, I set up a pilot focus group to help me prepare for working with middle years children. I was keen to develop my interview skills in preparation for further focus groups and interviews with them. The group did not discuss children's use of mobile / internet devices, but I chose a health topic instead. I wanted to focus on the group process with children rather than be distracted by the content.

Within the children's focus groups prompts and probes were used once again to encourage children's discussions. Within the children's mixed focus group the boys were very interested in talking about their games. Although relevant to the research, to avoid domination of this subject and as an attempt to encourage breath, several prompts were used to encourage girls to talk about communications that were of interest to them, such as texting.

3.2.5.2.3 Children's individual interviews

Once all the focus groups had been completed, and data analyzed, children's interviews were set up. An analysis of the focus groups helped to determine what issues needed further exploration in the interviews. An individual interview is defined as a purposeful verbal exchange where the interviewer attempts to capture the experience of the interviewee (Kvale, 1996; Schwandt, 2001). Different types of interview format were considered. Patton (1990) describes the conversational interview as the most open-ended approach to interviewing. While Denscombe (2014) suggests the structured interview, where there are tight controls over the format of questions, similar to a questionnaire. To adopt an open format might have risked the interview going off focus. To adopt a rigid format might have risked children not being able to talk freely. Patton's (1990) interview guide approach was selected, providing a balanced approach to interviewing. It allowed participants to talk and with the use of an interview schedule helped to keep the interview on focus. The schedule was shown to two other researchers for comment, before it was used. A copy was also provided to the ethics committee, so they were aware of what was being asked of children. No changes were requested.

As discussed, issues for inclusion in the schedule were developed following an analysis of all focus groups for the purpose of examining those issues in greater depth with children. The issues selected were those found to be important to children. They were presented as simple points within the schedule (Table 3.10). A further schedule was included for parents (Table 3.11), so their thoughts could

be discussed within children's interviews, where they highlighted their interest in participating.

Table 3.10

Children's interview schedule.

- Introductions - introduce the research along with some informal discussion and games
- Mobile phones / internet devices – what do you use?
- How do you use them? (internet, school, home) **1**
- Where do you keep them? **1**
- Communications engage in? **1**
- Planning activities? (out with friends) **5**
- Support with use of devices? **1 2 3**
- Influences on use? (parents, friends, school) **4**
- The future **5**
- Anything missed?
- Conclusions – discussion summarized and thanks given.

Prompts are in brackets. Probes – ask for examples, details, and clarification, where relevant.

Numbers indicate relationship to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory.

1. Individual settings – family and friends

2. Social ties between home and school

3. Settings that affect the child's life but the child is not part of, for example mother's work

4. Social and cultural settings that affect the child's life – Government policies and culture, for example

5. Time.

Table 3.11***Parents' interview schedule (part of the individual interview with children).***

- How do you feel about your child using a mobile phone and the internet?
- Any concerns or benefits? (travelling) **1 2 3 4 5**
- Do you provide support for your child's use of these devices? **1 2 3**
- Any comment about the way mobile / internet devices are used in society today? **4**
- Have you found any societal support that helps you to manage your child's use of these devices (school, church, phone companies, Government / charity websites)? **4**
- Anything we might have missed?

Prompts are in brackets. Probes – ask for examples, details, and clarification, where relevant.

Numbers indicate relationship to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory.

1. Individual settings – family and friends;
2. Social ties between home and school;
3. Settings that affect the child's life but the child is not present, for example mother's work;
4. Social and cultural settings that affect the child's life – Government policies and community groups, for example;
5. Time.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on social developed, the underpinning theory for the research, was used so his social settings could be linked with issues contained within the children's schedule. The purpose of this was to help with the analysis, making sure that issues were based around social settings meaningful to children.

In relation to parents his theory was applied for the purpose of gathering knowledge about the supportiveness of those social settings, which parents could provide for their children. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory helped to ensure that ontological constituents were applied to the gathering of new knowledge. The schedules followed a logical format, going from light to deeper questions. Both tables (3.10 and 3.11) show how the schedules relate to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) different social settings.

By interviewing children individually it was hoped they would reveal more about the meaning of their devices. Efforts were made to create interviews that they would find interesting as recommended (see Fraser, Lewis, Kellet & Robinson, 2004). The interviews were informal and undertaken in an age-appropriate way. Questions were thus carefully phrased and children given time to respond.

Within children's interviews prompts and probes were included. The purpose of prompts in this situation was more about providing children with ideas. They might feel worried that the focus of discussion was on them, whereas if they were given some ideas it might help to remind them of their own opinions. Probes were particularly important as the individual interviews were about finding deeper insights (Denscombe, 2014). As the interviewer I needed to probe some points further with children.

The following are examples of prompts and probes used within the interviews. An example of a prompt can be found within the following quote [*I* indicates the interviewer and *B* indicates the pseudonym given to the child].

I: Do you use the internet?

B: No, I don't have the internet.

I: At school? At home?

B: We use it quite a lot at school. At home we are allowed to go on some games, which is fun. There is a website that I always go on – CBBC website [Interview 5, 10 years].

If the first response had been accepted these important details would have been missed. The prompts helping to ensure the boy gives the question a little more thought.

An example of a probe used in one interview is where a girl is asked about her mobile phone use when going out. [*I* again indicates interviewer, *J* indicates the child's pseudonym.]

J: Like I take it on a walk.

I: How does that make you feel when you take it with you?

J: You sort of feel safer. In case like anything happens to you. You have got your phone with you to ring for help.

I: Yes [Interview 1, 12 years].

Using the probe helps to gain a real sense of how this girl feels when she takes her mobile out with her when alone.

As well as prompts and probes being used within interviews to find out more information, it was also important to sometimes provide support with the information children provided, as in this interview. Here a boy talks about taking his mobile to school. [*I* indicates interviewer and *W* indicates the pseudonym].

I: How do you feel going 20 miles to school each day, having the phone in your bag?

W: It actually makes me feel quite safe really. If anything goes wrong I can always text them.

I: If anything happens that you are not happy about, you can always reach them. Good [Interview 3, 11 years].

All these techniques were used to support children as well as encouraging them to share their thoughts. The following section will look at how data was collected from participants.

3.2.5.3 Data Collection

Five *parent focus groups* were organised and undertaken. The first group was a pilot group. The other four groups were research groups with one undertaken a little later than the rest, so there was time to think about evidence gathered from earlier groups before going into the final group. Three research parent groups were provided for analysis, as one could not be used.

After negotiating with children, parents and the school, along with undertaking a pilot group, three *children's research focus groups* were organised and undertaken. It was emphasised to children before undertaking each of these groups that there were no wrong or right answers; it was their opinions that mattered. Haghish and Teymoori (2013) call this the *right answer problem*. Usually children think that there is a right answer to a question and try to guess the answer expected, instead of providing their opinion. Children's own opinions mattered; therefore it was essential that this was stressed to them before each focus group. Three research focus groups were tape recorded with the permission of children and their parents. A parent or teacher was present, or nearby, during each of the focus groups.

Young people's / young adults' focus groups were undertaken next. A pilot group with young people took place initially. As with other groups these

research groups were tape recorded with participants' permission. Three research groups provided data for analysis.

Children's individual interviews (sometimes with parents) were finally undertaken. Once again an initial pilot interview took place. Each research interview was tape recorded with the permission of children and parents. 11 children's research interviews were available for analysis. Parents either took part in the interviews or were close by when the interviews took place.

All participants were thanked for their participation and a small gift was given in line with BPS (2010) recommendations. An opportunity for participants to debrief following each focus group and individual interview was provided, in line with BPS (2010) recommendations.

Data gathering commenced in 2010 and was completed by 2013. Data were stored securely, as advised by the BPS (2010). All the focus group interviews and individual interviews were fully transcribed. Data from each type of participant (children, parents and young people) became known as a data set. Each data set was transcribed and analyzed by me, before commencing work on the next. Participants were sent a summary of their discussion. Dyson and Brown (2006) maintain that participant verification, as this is known, helps the researcher check for accuracy. Only one participant requested some amendments, which were duly undertaken.

3.3 Conclusions

Chapter 3 has carefully explained the methodology and methods that were used within the research and justified why particular approaches were adopted. Different participants and different methods were selected to enrich this research on children's and parents' views about children's mobile / internet devices. The research process involved distinct changes along the way, both in

terms of focus and methodology. Some of the decisions made about methodological change for example, were not always without associated difficulties, particularly with regard to me adapting to those changes. On reflection, the decision by the ethics committee to allow me to explore children's views opened up a range of different possibilities. Most importantly, this decision influenced a change in research direction, which otherwise might not have occurred; studying children themselves and giving them a voice. A qualitative research approach was thus adopted. Using a qualitative approach allowed me as the researcher to get closer to children's views. Although I had previously worked with children, I had not worked with them as a qualitative researcher. Having undertaken several focus groups I eventually became more relaxed with the informal approach of qualitative research, compared to the formality more commonly associated with quantitative research, which had been my original starting point. Reflecting on the triangulated research design, although diverse by including the perspectives of different generations of participants, it would help me to investigate new and exciting knowledge about children and their devices. Analyzing their views presented a new set of challenges, as chapter 4 describes.

Chapter 4: Analysis process

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 examines how themes were developed from an analysis of participants' transcripts, primarily children's and parents' transcripts, with young people's / young adults' transcripts playing a comparative role. The purpose in developing themes for the research was to create an understanding on the meaning of mobile / internet devices for middle years children (7 - 12 years) and their parents. This chapter discusses the themes briefly, primarily demonstrating the process in their development, particularly highlighting why certain ideas were included and others excluded. As Braun and Clark (2014) maintain it is essential for the researcher to reflect on actual decisions made in the development of knowledge. Outlining reasons why ideas are included and excluded in theme development is an essential part of the research process. The themes themselves will be discussed individually within chapters 5, 6 and 7.

As Smith and Firth (2011) note transparency is essential within qualitative research. It is the process of demonstrating openness, clarity and trust within analysis (Smith & Firth, 2011). Importantly, both for purposes of rigour (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Cooney, 2011) and so others can critically appraise this research (Smith & Firth, 2011), transparency will be demonstrated. As the researcher my ideas surrounding the transcripts during different stages of theme development are thus discussed. Chapter 4 is very much a background chapter to the findings; detailing theme origins through reflection.

4.2 The analysis process

One of the few shared skills across qualitative research is identifying themes, which are thus able to provide meaning on data gathered (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Approaches within qualitative research can be quite different (Lyons & Coyle, 2007), but they do share this skill in common. Learning to analyze data was going to be challenging for me, having previously not undertaken qualitative research. The process was slightly daunting initially, but undertaken methodically as this chapter discusses.

4.2.1 Data analysis

An inductive approach was used to analyze data, as I wanted participants' realities, particularly children's realities to determine the focus. I spent a long time looking at data. As ideas were created they were later linked with relevant theoretical perspectives, as the thesis was written. The literature review, although it eludes to what issues might be of interest within the research, it was written in line with ideas developed from participants themselves highlighting the inductive nature of the research. The following outlines data analysis in more detail.

All the focus group interviews and individual interviews that were put forward for analysis were tape recorded with participants' permission. The parent focus group that was not tape recorded, due to permission not being given, could not be used for analysis. Participants' requests need to be respected, disappointing though it was not to be able to use data from this focus group. As many qualitative researchers maintain all data should be tape recorded and transcribed (Nyamathi & Shuler 1990; Sim 1998; Côté Arsenault et al., 1999). Barbour (2008) suggests that only selected extracts need to be tape recorded and transcribed. However, an accurate record needed to be created from all the different interviews undertaken, which only tape recording and transcribing can do. At this early stage in the research it might have been difficult for me to

determine exactly what data to include and exclude from each transcript, so tape recording all interviews was thus necessary.

Participants' transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Thematic analysis, as mentioned, is a process of identifying patterns within data and analysing them (Borrell, 2008). The transcripts were read and re-read several times and analysis was undertaken. Themes were ultimately developed after much thought and reflection. The traditional approach of hand coding each transcript was used. Computer programs are now available to help with the process of coding, storing and moving data. However, as Low (2010) points out, a program will not do the conceptual work required. In gaining insights into other approaches I examined the qualitative computer program *NVivo* (2014). Some practical sessions were undertaken with another researcher. However, on reflection, using Schön's (1983, 2011) approach, although I found it interesting to learn how to operate the program, I felt that it was more important to learn the basic foundational skills of analysis by undertaking the process myself, certainly during this early phase of learning to become a qualitative researcher. I needed to establish the important foundational skills of qualitative research before embarking on alternative ways of undertaking analysis.

Each transcript was analyzed four times; twice generally and twice semantically. Transcripts were coded based on their own merits, and in comparison with other transcripts within and across data sets. It was an arduous and lengthy task, particularly due to the number of transcripts that needed to be analyzed and compared. This comparison of transcripts, known as the constant comparative process (Byrant & Charmaz, 2010), helps with the identification of similar patterns across data. Memos were also written and recorded in a note book for each data set. Charmaz (2009), Byrant & Charmaz (2010) recommend memo taking, as it helps the researcher to understand the meaning of codes. This was helpful, particularly as several weeks might elapse before returning to a data set to reflect further on its meaning. Following a process of further reading on how to

develop themes within data (Pollio & Ursiak, 2006; Smith et al., 2011) and thinking about my data, I went on to develop themes. Theme development took a number of twists and turns, which will be discussed.

The final themes developed were written into the thesis and carefully refined during writing. Barbour (2008) highlights that refining frequently occurs as the researcher's knowledge develops through the iterative process associated with qualitative research. Of course the themes needed to be considered further at this stage in relation to theory, particularly young people's theory, in line with the epistemological approach adopted.

4.2.2 Theme development

Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) describe six stages to the process of thematic analysis. In this section how their process was applied to data will be explained. The first two stages require the researcher to become familiar with data and then begin coding. The process of familiarization for me began with transcribing all tape recorded focus groups and individual interviews. A long period of coding then followed; understanding how different parts of data related to my research questions.

Each transcript, as mentioned, was coded four times. Semantic coding was used to look for meanings within participants' discussions. As Braun and Clarke (2013) outline, semantic coding goes beyond the specific content of participants' discussions looking for meanings. Co-coding was also undertaken with two experienced qualitative researchers. I found this helpful, particularly with moving from descriptive to semantic coding, and learning how to ask questions of data. Reports for each data set based on coding were shared with these researchers. Mapping of codes was also undertaken at various stages of the coding process, as a way of helping me to understand what was both interesting and important within each data set.

Stages three and four, described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013), include searching for themes and then reviewing those themes. Codes were summarised into key themes. The process of developing themes underwent several changes; refining and redefining. Initially, I had thought that *concerns and opportunities*, associated with children using their devices, were the main themes. These themes seemed strongest within parents' data. They were also somewhat similar to what Livingstone and Haddon (2009) had found through their quantitative research on children's / young people's internet use. However, studying children's data in more depth, *safety* emerged as a very significant theme for them. Following inclusion of analysis from young people's / young adults' data and looking across all data sets, notions of *freedom* were apparent, underlying both children's thoughts on safety and parents' concerns. Children's emerging sense of freedom, both in terms of communication and behaviour, linked the different data sets together. This emerging sense of freedom was why children wanted to feel safe, but it also gave parents reasons for concern. Included within children's emerging sense of freedom parents were providing different levels of support, with the mobile phone playing a key role in helping their children to stay safe. Parents' support for children's *emerging freedom* could be linked with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) different social settings; parents facilitating support within each of those settings.

For young people / young adults they were at a different stage of freedom, but linking their analysis with parents' and children's analyzes provided a wider social perspective on what was happening; it enabled me to see beyond the day to day situations of children and their parents, and thus consider where ultimately children were going with their communication and behaviour. Children's mobile / internet devices were developmentally helping them to progress, enhancing their social development. Reading about young people's / young adults' use of these devices further enhanced my views on this perspective.

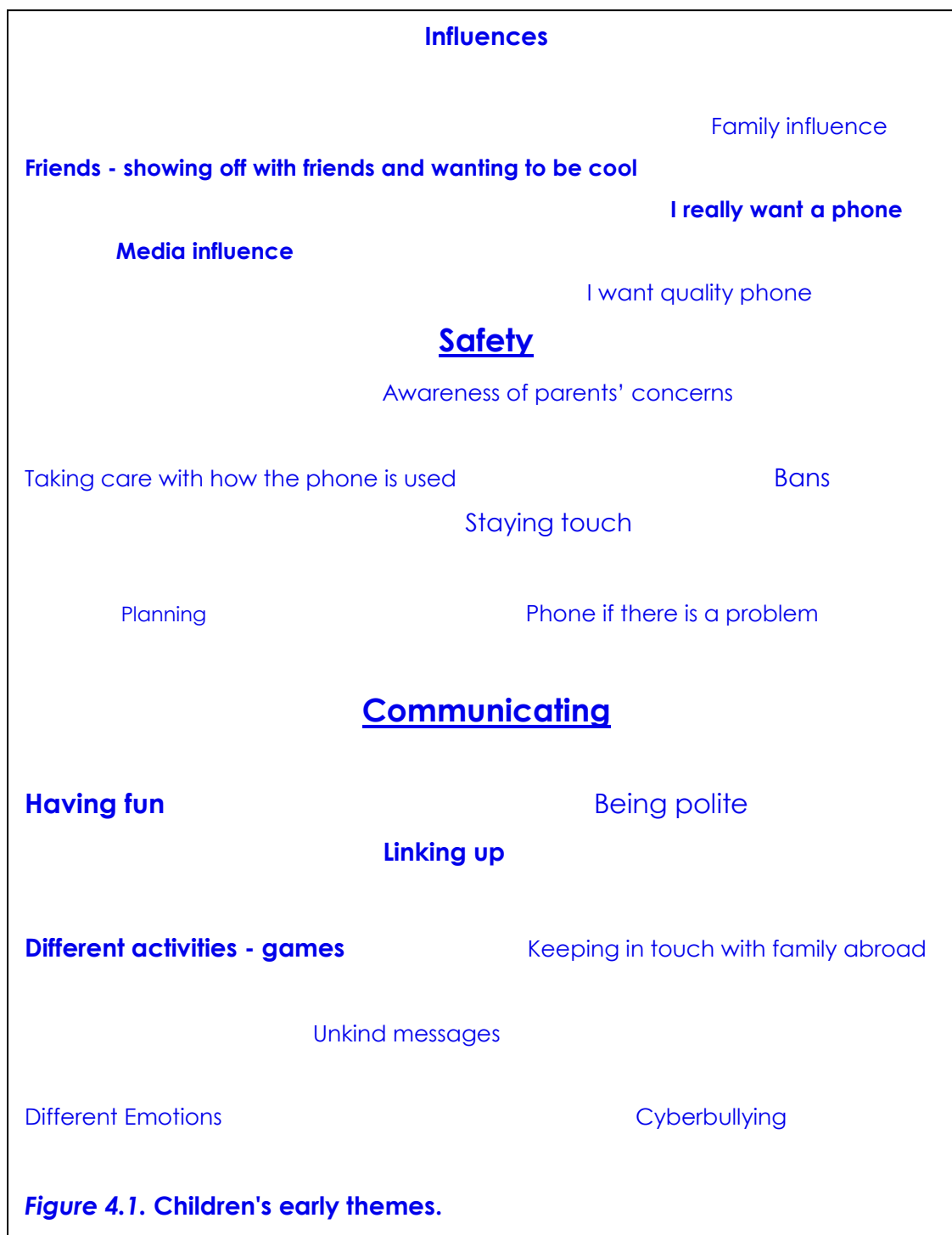
However, it could be argued that it was inappropriate to consider children's and parents' views, alongside young people's / young adults' views, as

epistemologically critical realism allows (Maxwell, 2012). By comparing groups of participants who are generationally different will provide different perspectives. It is more usual within research to compare participations of a similar generation, who might find themselves in slightly different circumstances. For me however by studying young people / young adults, looking beyond the here and now and seeing where children might be with their communications and behaviours in several years time, helped me to understand the developmental significance of their current social behaviours. It provided an understanding about what was happening with children. By looking at the different realities of these participants, different perspectives on similar issues could be seen, providing generational perspectives. This allowed children's social development to be considered in future terms; beyond the here and now. Young people's / young adults' perspectives, both views and later literature, provided a valuable resource (Maxwell, 2012) in this process.

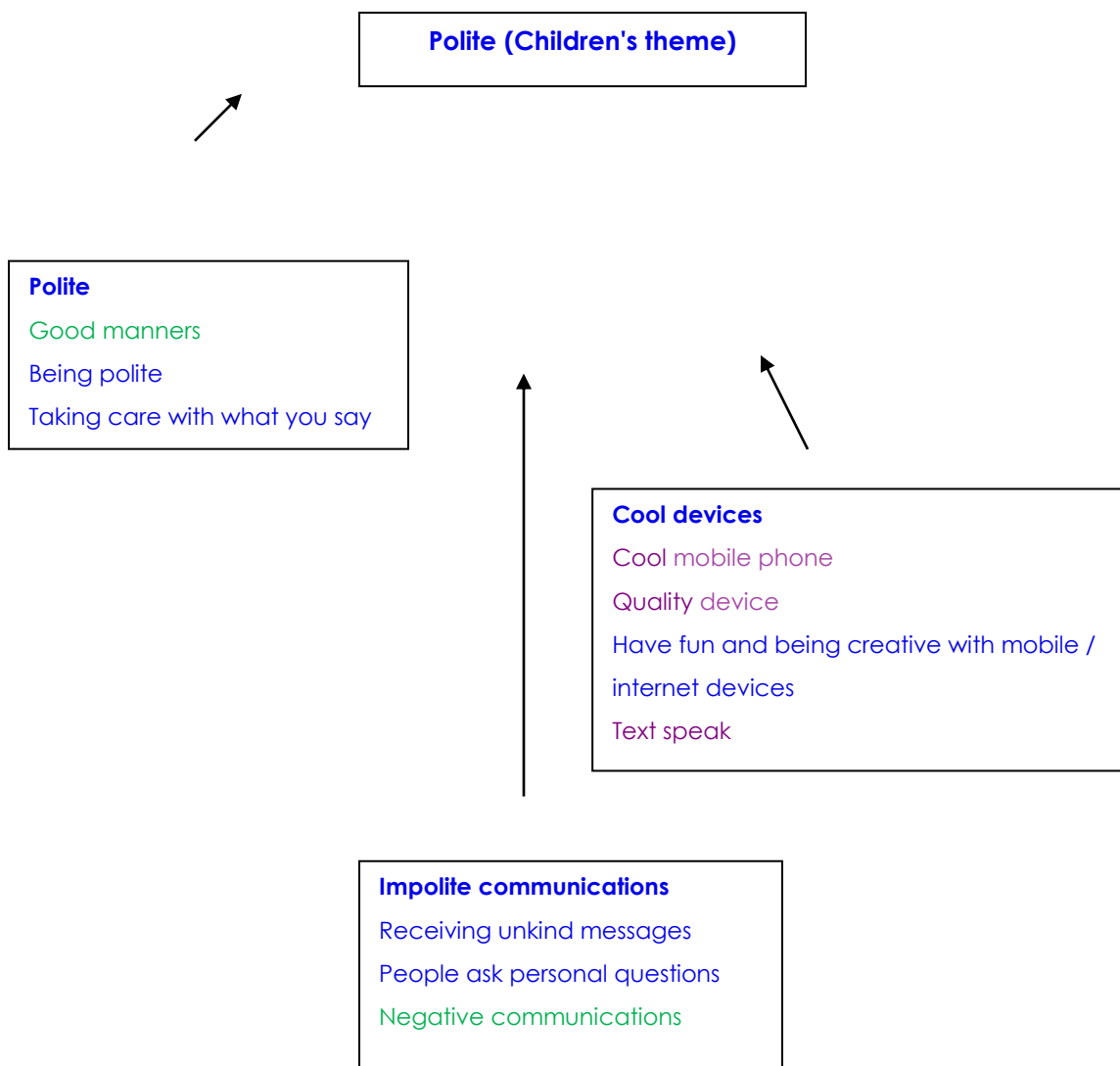
Children's theme development is highlighted through the following diagrams. As discussed, the themes were revised several times, but with the overall purpose of creating a more meaningful explanation of data than initially proposed. Once I felt more confident that the particular themes associated with *emerging freedom* (see chapters 5, 6 and 7) were able to explain data more appropriately than earlier suggestions, all the transcripts were re-read and re-coded where necessary, as Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) recommend. This was to ensure that codes and themes were an accurate representation of participants' data.

4.2.2.1 Children's themes

As Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) recommend mind maps can be a useful tool within theme development. Mind maps were developed during the analysis. Figure 4.1 shows a mind map that was developed for children's data during the initial stages of theme development.



Figures 4.2 and 4.3 show later revised versions, including connections between children's themes, parents' themes, and young people's themes; different colours illustrating these connections.

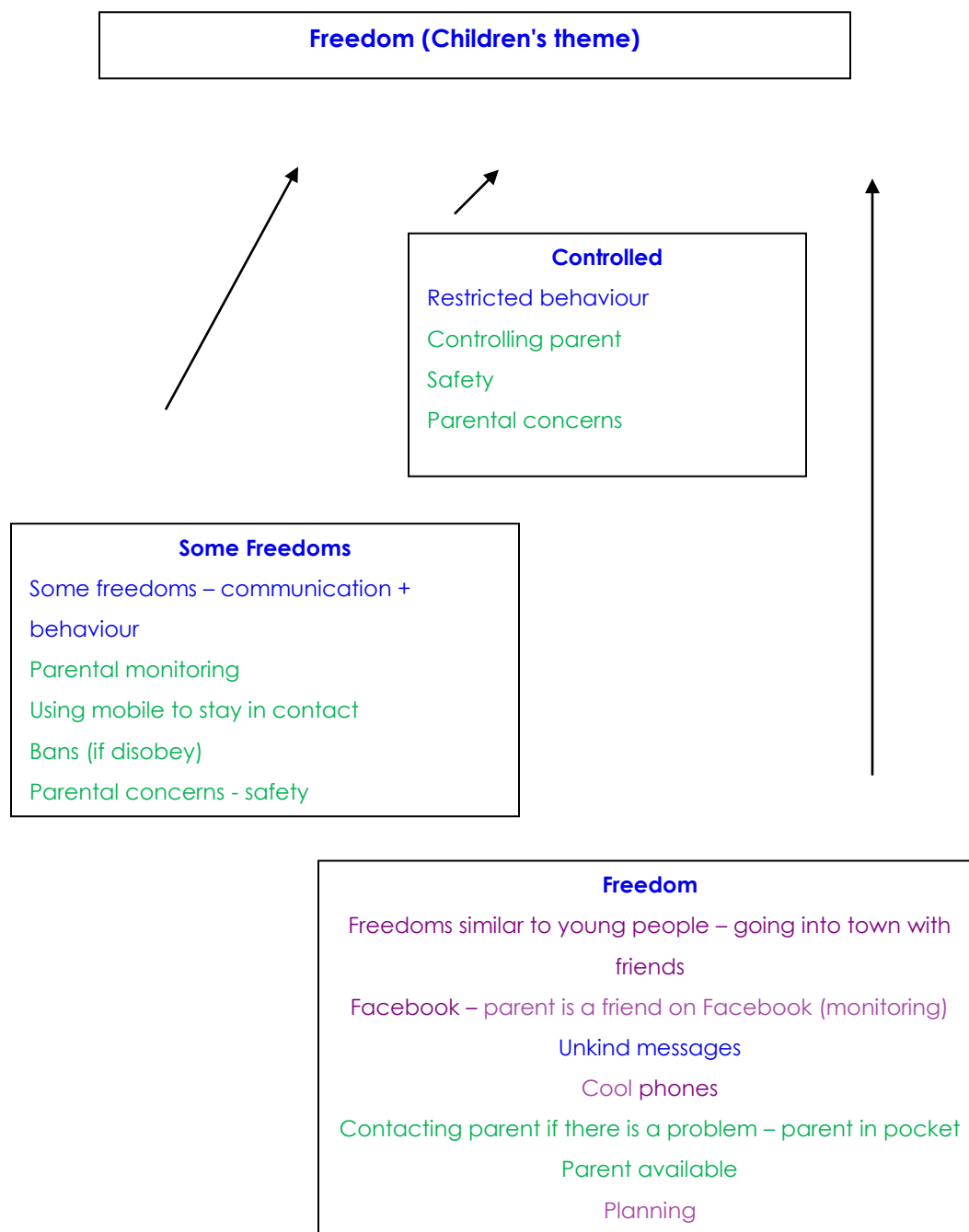


Colour code

The colours illustrate connections in themes between different groups of participants.

Blue = children's data, Green = parents' data, Mauve = young people's data.

Figure 4.2. Children's theme 1.



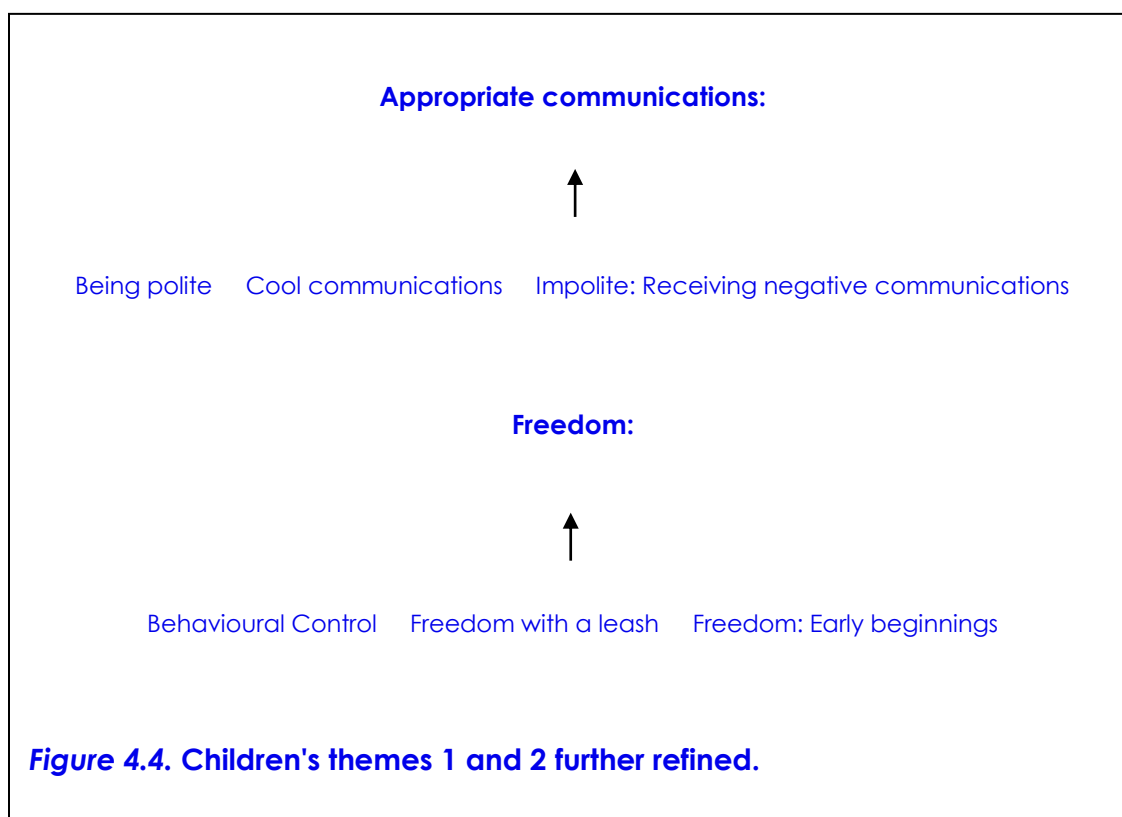
Colour code

The colours illustrate connections in themes between different groups of participants.

Blue = children's data, Green = parents' data, Mauve = young people's data.

Figure 4.3. Children's theme 2.

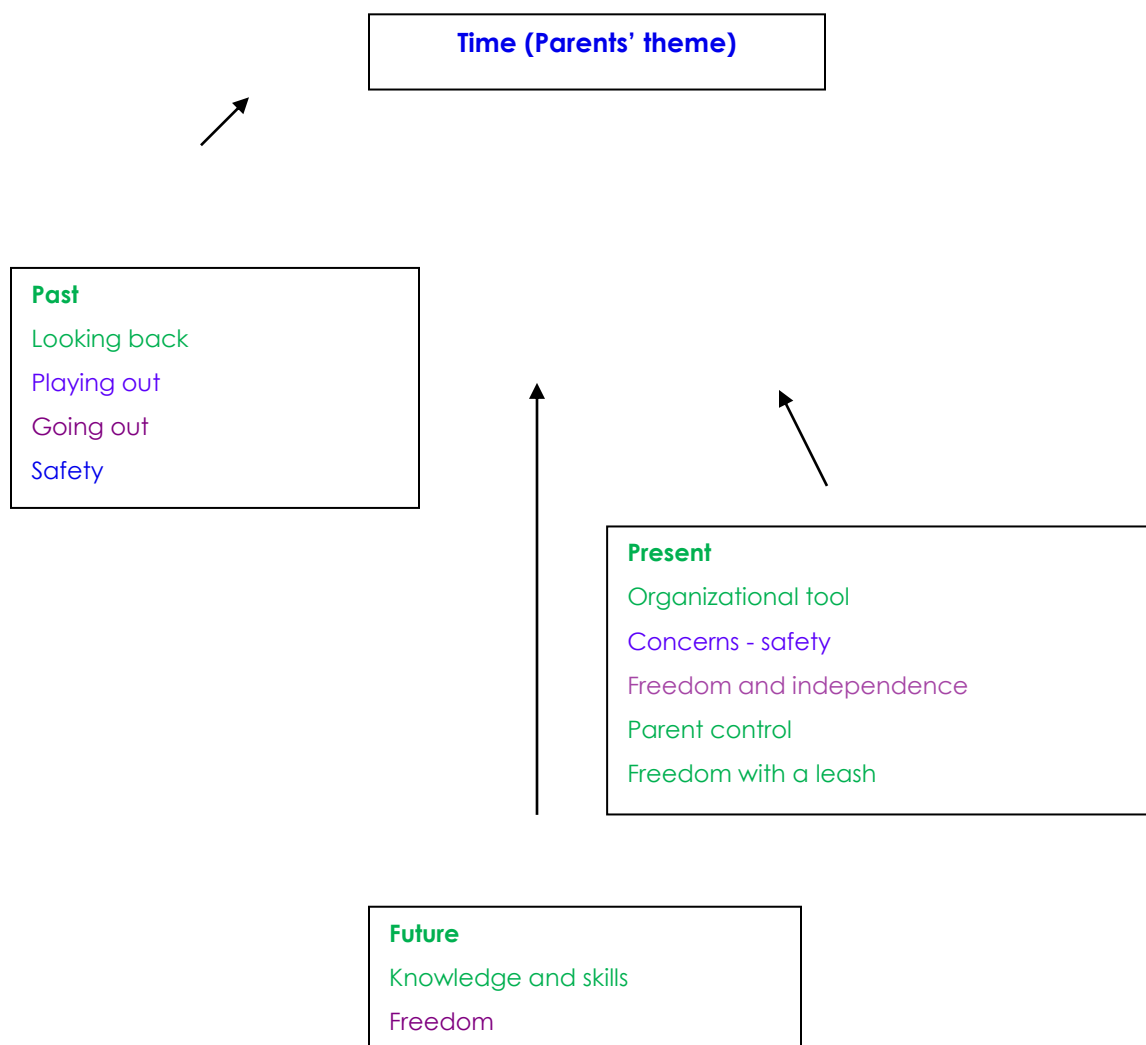
Figure 4.4 shows the final themes and subthemes addressing the first research question on children's meanings about their devices.



4.2.2.2 Parents' themes

Mind mapping was also undertaken with parents' data (the second research question), on the meaning of children's devices within the parenting role. Figure 4.5 shows an initial mind map developed from parents' data. Figure 4.6 shows a later revised version, linking parents' data with that of children's data and young people's data. The final mind map Figure 4.7 shows the theme and subthemes associated with parents' data.



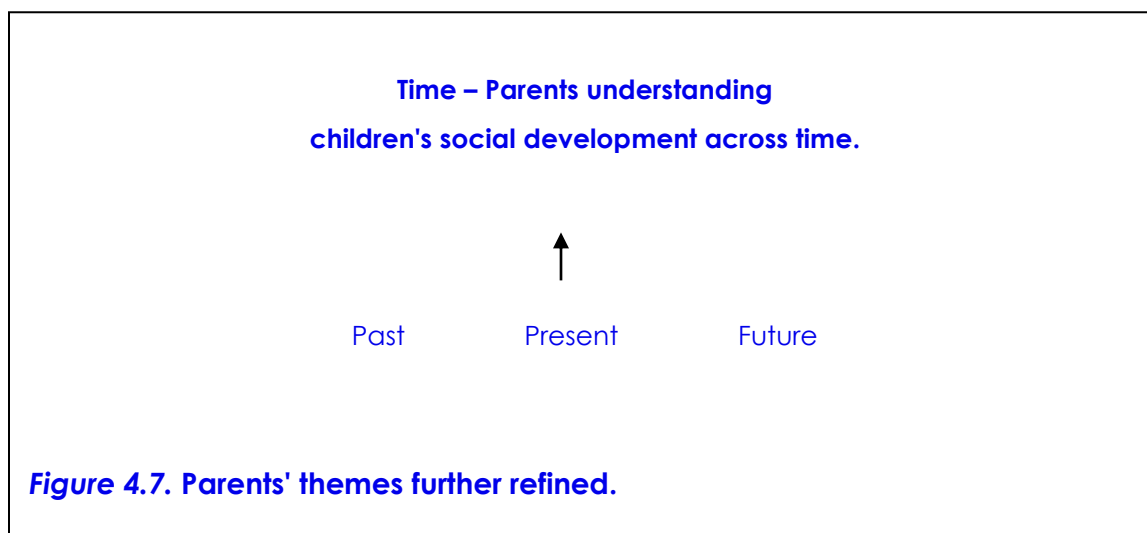


Colour code

The colours illustrate the connections in themes between different groups of participants.

Green = parents' data, Blue = children's data, Mauve = young people's data.

Figure 4.6. Parents' theme development.



Essentially, many different themes were developed in the beginning, so no potential themes could be ruled out. Themes became more refined and modified as the analysis continued and my understanding about them developed. Further for me, through this process, a deeper understanding developed too about how participants' data linked with the theoretical underpinning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Thematic stages five and six (Braun & Clarke's, 2006, 2013) were about defining themes and writing a narrative. Themes have to be considered individually and in relation to one another through a continual iterative process. Further, incorporation of established knowledge during this process, helped me to develop a better understanding about the themes, as the following chapters demonstrate.

4.3 Conclusions

Chapter 4 has outlined the process involved in data analysis, particularly theme development. Through this process three themes were constructed, which could provide meaningful insights and understandings about children's use of mobile / internet devices, based upon the views of children and their parents.

Within this chapter it has been interesting to reflect upon theme development and observe how ideas seemed to build upon each other; from one idea rejected another would grow and develop. For example with children's safety, I thought about its connection with children's need for freedom; one idea rejected as a theme but another further explored. As Braun and Clarke (2013) maintain, the researcher plays an active role in decisions about themes. The decisions made are not random decisions but are based on hard work and much thought about data, where potentially, as demonstrated in this chapter, ideas grew and developed based upon previous thoughts and ideas. Importantly, questioning data and my own thoughts about it through reflection (Schön, 1983, 2011). Transparency is essential within qualitative research. It is important so that others can critically appraise the research. Describing how the analysis was undertaken, as discussed here; what decisions were made and why at the thematic stage, are part of being transparent.

The focus now changes to provide details about the themes themselves. As Braun and Clarke (2013) maintain themes are not set in stone. Undoubtedly my ideas about the themes will evolve as I examine them in detail through the process of writing up, reviewing each theme alongside the transcripts as I do so. Examining the themes in this way will bring me closer to an understanding of children's meanings, and parents' role in children's use of their devices, as the research questions demand.

Introduction to the findings chapters – 5, 6 and 7

Analyzing children's (7 – 12 years) and parents' views about children's use of mobile / internet devices, three main themes emerged – *appropriate communications*, *freedom* and *time*, each with their own subthemes. The following chapters present each of those themes.

Initially, some background to each of these themes will be presented. Themes 1 and 2 address the first research question - *What do mobile phones / internet devices mean to children (7 - 12 years) within their lives, as described by children themselves?* These themes primarily present children's views, although parents' views and young people's views are also included, which triangulate themes (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Theme 3 addresses the second research question - *What are parents' views about their role within children's use of mobile phones / internet devices?* This theme mainly includes parents' views about children's devices and parents' role, with young people's views providing additional support.

Epistemologically, critical realism (Maxwell, 2012) has been applied to the development of the themes; exploring participants' realities closely alongside existing knowledge. The themes are thus examined in a much broader social context, helping an understanding of children's social development to be created. Links are made with social development in relation to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory.

Quotes from participants are presented in these chapters with abbreviations used as outlined below.

Abbreviations

- Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of all participants.
- I = interviewer, R = respondent.
- ... Represents a pause or where someone else has interjected so the participant was not able to complete his / her response.
- [...] Indicates that part of the quote has been left out.
- Parent focus group - Parent fgp
- Girls focus group – Girls' fgp
- Boys' focus group – Boys' fgp
- Mixed children's focus group - children's fgp
- Young people's and young adults' focus group – Ypfgp
- Interviews - int.

Views expressed in this thesis represent the views of several participants, unless otherwise stated. The quotes presented are the best examples of those views.

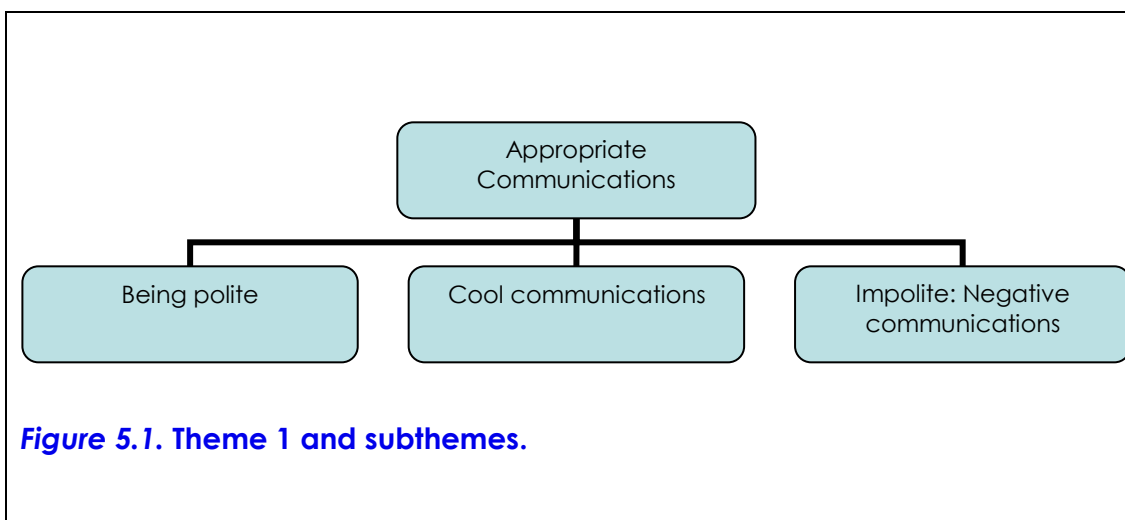
Chapter 5: Theme 1 – Children's views - Appropriate communications

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses theme 1: *Appropriate communications* in which children discuss appropriate ways to communicate on their mobile / internet devices. The chapter examines children's experiences and thoughts; their realities. Further, children's possible meanings are explored. The chapter creates a context for children's communications on their devices.

As the literature review highlighted children use a variety of different devices for communication. Communicating with friends was important (Healy & Anderson, 2007; Livingstone & Brake, 2010; Ofcom, 2012a). Evidence on communication tended to focus on children communicating safely (Byron, 2008, 2010, Ofcom, 2012a, 2014) and negative communications (Charlton et al., 2002; Davie et al., 2004, Ofcom, 2012a, 2013). However, there appeared to be little detail on what children themselves thought about how they should communicate with others on their mobile devices. This chapter will examine what children themselves think about their communications.

Evidence from within this research showed that children cared about how they communicated on their devices. Using terms highlighted by participants, the following subthemes emerged – *being polite*, *cool communications*, and *impolite: receiving negative communications* (Figure 5.1). Each of these subthemes will be explored in-depth as part of the theme *appropriate communications*.



Children's views on appropriate communications were revealed through close analysis of their focus groups and individual interviews. Initially, by carefully looking at what children said about appropriate ways to communicate, and then examining what they said about inappropriate communications, helped to develop an understanding of their realities. Children seemed eager to communicate appropriately, with a clear sense of when communications might be considered inappropriate. They were able to identify inappropriate communications within their own and particularly others communications. Children believed that communications to and from each other should be polite.

5.2 Being polite

The term polite was used by many participants to define children's sense of good manners towards others. Polite communications consisted of verbal communications and written communications. Both parents and children saw the importance of children communicating politely on mobile / internet devices. However, some parents were concerned that children might not be communicating as politely as they should. Parents were keen that children's communications were the same on these devices as they were within face to face interactions.

Mother: It's trying to instil in her the safety, and to instil in her correct levels of behaviour on a computer. I feel like I say to her - wouldn't accept you swearing and saying inappropriate things to your friends in your bedroom, if I heard you. So I don't expect you to do it on a computer [Parent fgp 3].

Yet, children were much more aware of the importance of communicating politely than their parents appreciated, as the following section discusses.

5.2.1 Polite - verbally

Children themselves felt their mobile phone conversations should be polite. Being polite was initially demonstrated in the need to consider others in their conversations. This first example shows Rachel expressing the need for her communications to be considerate toward others.

Rachel: If I was phoning them in the car by accident, I would ask them where they were. I would be asking them if I was interrupting anything. If they said yes I would say sorry and put the phone down [Girls' fgp, 8 - 10 years].

Rachel highlights that when phoning someone (mobile to mobile) there was a need to know if it was convenient for the other person to talk. She understood that when one makes a call it may not be. In such a situation, Rachel felt, she should apologize and put the phone down. Etiquette guides on mobile phones for example state that this is the correct way to behave (GSM Associates, 2008, 2012). Consideration is required because the caller has to think that they might be calling at a difficult time for the recipient. This could be potentially awkward or even embarrassing for all involved. It is encouraging to see that Rachel already understood the need to be considerate in her communications with others on the mobile phone, and not to call inappropriately. This same view was confirmed by young people in their focus groups. *Natalie: [...] If I am trying to contact someone I always text them before I ring them, to see if they are there [Ypfgp 2, 19 - 21 years].* Phoning people directly was thought to be intrusive of

people's time and not considerate. It was thought far better to text first to find out if it was convenient to call.

Politeness was also demonstrated amongst some children in the need to consider the feelings of others when using mobiles in public.

Rachel: I would have it on silent. Like, if I was in an interview I would have it on silent. If it was on and suddenly my phone goes I would be quite embarrassed.

I: So you seem quite aware about how phones can interrupt situations?

Rachel: Yeah.

Holly: I would call the messages when I got home
[Girls' fgp, 8 - 10 years].

These two girls understood how mobiles can interrupt ongoing interactions. They were showing that they had to consider those around them before responding to a call, particularly in public. Such considerations may have been mentioned to them by their parents.

Literature on young people's / young adults' use suggests that they had a lack of awareness on this issue when they first started using mobile phones (Plant, 2000; Ling, 2004; Katz, 2009). These authors provide examples of where young people completely ignored the impact their mobiles had on those around them; in some situations to the annoyance of others. Yet here children (8 - 10 years) were already talking about how important it was to consider others, particularly when using mobiles in public.

Both quotes in this section describe children behaving considerately in an effort to be polite. The description by Rachel particularly, about what she would do if she phoned someone and found that she was interrupting an ongoing conversation, is so vivid that it feels almost real. It seems that Rachel knows what it feels like to have a conversation with someone interrupted by the mobile

phone. From such an experience she has learnt to consider the feelings of others, through the failings of someone being inconsiderate with her when using their mobile perhaps. A parent may not have acted as a good role model when using his / her mobile. Gardner and Davis (2014) advocate parents need to act as role models of appropriate mobile communications with their children to support their development.

These children had learnt to be considerate in their mobile communications. Being considerate is a particularly sensitive communication skill for children to learn. They did not have their own mobile phone; they were using their parents' mobiles. Yet already they were able to demonstrate appropriate mobile behaviours. The literature on children's use of mobile phones has not really commented on children behaving considerately within their communications. Evidence to support the appropriateness of their behaviour comes from young people's use of these devices, for example Palmer (2007) and Obee (2012). They highlight the importance of young people being considerate in how they communicate with others on their mobile devices.

As evidenced earlier, parents encourage their children to behave appropriately on their devices. Perhaps children are much more aware than parents realise about the importance of being polite. These examples demonstrate children being considerate when making and receiving calls. Communicating in this considerate way may not be undertaken by all children, but evidence here suggests that it is being thought about by some. Perhaps children are growing up to be more aware of the importance of being polite with their mobile communications than previous generations. This may be due to growing up in a culture and time where mobile phones are very much part of their lives; mobiles are all around them. Yet for today's young adults this was not the situation when growing up; mobile phones were not so commonplace.

5.2.2 Polite – in writing

Evidence of polite communications could also be found within children's discussions about their written communications on mobile / internet devices.

5.2.2.1 Receiving replies

As highlighted already in the literature review (Ofcom, 2012a, 2013) children enjoyed writing emails / text messages to their friends.

R: I like texting my friends. In the evening I like to text them when watching TV [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

Children also enjoyed receiving replies.

Fiona: I like using the mobile phone. I like sending texts. You can get replies back and you can keep going. [...]

Nicky: I like being able to call my friends. I like being able to email my family in Australia [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

Johnsen (2009), writing about young people, suggests this process of exchanging written messages can be perceived as rather similar to the exchange of gifts. He considers an email / text to be a social gift. Thus for children they are politely exchanging gifts; social gifts in the form of written emails / texts. Children perceived this whole process as fun. Similarly, young people interviewed said they enjoyed sending emails / texts but they differed in their need to receive a reply; it seemed less significant to them. Young people said that they did not always get replies, but they did not always reply themselves either. *Gavin: I don't always reply [Ypfgp 2, 19 - 21 years]*. Then another – *Maggie: I can't reply all the time*, perhaps suggesting that she did not always have the time to reply to everyone [Ypfgp 2, 19 - 21 years].

Researchers have found that emailing / texting is very popular with young people (Green, 2009; Obee, 2012; Boyd, 2014). Green (2009) discussed how the sending of written texts depended upon replies being received, or at least the probability of a reply. With young people, she found, if replies were not received no further texts were sent. However, Green's (2009) evidence differs with evidence from young people in this research, who did not always perceive replying as necessary. For some young people as they become older the need to always reply to their messages becomes less significant, whereas this differs for children; it is important to them. Communicating via emails / texts is still new and replying is perceived as an important part of the communication process. It is also considered polite to reply. Etiquette guides (Post, 2004) advise that email / text communications should be replied to.

Writing emails / texts and receiving replies are particularly important to children. Children have adopted these written forms of communication enthusiastically and try to do so as politely as possible. Children seem to exchange written messages just as they might exchange small gifts with one another. They delight in giving and receiving written messages.

5.2.2.2 Writing carefully

As with verbal communication, parents were keen that their children's written communications should be polite. Parents particularly understood how easy it was with written communications, by not taking care, to get it wrong.

Mother: ... I read, reread, not just once, but twice everything I do on an email. I don't like sending emails, because I have a funny sense of humour; tongue in cheek most of the time [Parent fgp 3].

The parent in the above quote maintains how important it was for her when writing emails / texts, to take care to avoid making mistakes and upsetting others. Young adults took a similar view; *R1: I try to word it carefully and be grammatically correct. R2: I always write emails like I would write a letter*

[Ypfgp 3]. Baron (2010) supports this view too; she points out that it is important to edit emails / texts before sending to avoid making mistakes and thus avoid upsetting others.

By carefully considering what to write, emails / texts can be a polite way to communicate. Each word and for that matter each letter, has to be carefully considered to ensure meaning is conveyed in the way a sender wishes the recipient to interpret it. Parents believed that there was the potential for written communications to be polite, if they were carefully worded. Parents were keen to encourage this approach within their children's email / text communications, so they could avoid communication problems. However, not all young people and parents agreed with this view; emails / texts were perceived as simply quick communications by some. Young people – *Maggie: A text is just quick* [Ypfgp 2, 19 – 21 years]. Some parents felt that they were just thrown together with everyone resorting to abbreviations and text speak, as the following demonstrates.

Parent 1: You know what see you next Tuesday means?

Parent 2: Or see you next Thursday? [...]

Parent 1: I know it is for communication, but...

Parent 2: [...] Yes it is easy if you have only got 5 minutes and I will just rattle that off [Parent fgp 2].

There were clearly differences amongst parents and young people about the potential for politeness. Some felt that emails / texts could be polite if they were put together carefully, but others felt they were frequently thrown together, reducing the likelihood of a polite message being sent. Yet, parents definitely agreed that their children should be sending polite emails / texts, but were not always so good at it themselves. This highlights an inconsistency within parents' expectations of their children and what they actually did themselves.

Writing politely was important for children too. Some children interviewed expressed the view that it was important to write polite messages. For example, on texting, one child said *Fiona: About being careful about what you say* [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years]. Children perhaps did not want to offend others by writing careless texts. For other children writing carefully was about keeping emails / texts private, as Zac highlights in his interview. *Zac: Everyone does not have to see what you have written, just the person who you want to write it to* [Int: 4, 11 years]. He emphasized the need to take care with the individualisation of messages; rather than sending written messages to lots of children, who may not find the message relevant. Sending irrelevant messages to others might potentially confuse.

It was possible to get closer to children's views on writing politely when the analysis was approached from a different perspective; by looking at their views about receiving impolite messages from others, children's views became much clearer. Children were upset to receive impolite messages. Much of their evidence in this regard centred on receiving impolite messages and how they dealt with them. This will be explored further in the subtheme *impolite* (section 5.4).

Overall, there is evidence that children believe it is important to write messages politely. Evidence presented here and later within the subtheme *impolite*, demonstrate that writing emails / texts carefully is an important part of the communication process for children on their devices, perhaps as a way of helping to ensure that they and others are not upset by what is written. With children's enthusiasm for sending emails / texts, being polite might develop as an implicit part of the communication process without realising it. There would be little sense in writing impolitely, as they may not receive a reply or alternatively receive a reply that might upset them. Children's communication behaviours were about increasing the likelihood of receiving an appropriate reply. For them there was more to be gained by writing carefully appropriately worded emails /

texts; greater satisfaction with their communications and maintaining the exchange of these important social gifts - emails / texts.

5.2.2.3 Typing carefully

Children's and parents' concerns about communicating on devices differed. Children's concerns about writing polite emails / texts centred on typing them. However, parents were concerned about text speak and its development within children's written language, as the following outlines.

Mother: Sending a few emails out on my iPhone from work, and you do write it a little more shorthand, but it worries me. Children more and more they write things on Facebook, ... typing, it is meant to be typed, and ... writing birthday cards, letters, and a piece of work to submit for school, and the text, text is shortened. Text shortenedness is taking over [Int: 2, 11 years].

Written language on mobiles / internet devices is sometimes used in a different way from more usual written communications. Words are sometimes abbreviated and shortened, as parents mentioned. In some cases this has become a new way of communicating, referred to as *text speak* (Crystal, 2008). It was interesting to explore parents' thoughts about the impact of text speak on children's writing. They worried that their children would not be able to write clearly worded communications, as a result of using text speak.

Participating children in comparison, did not seem to have any concerns about the way they wrote their emails / texts. It was simply something they did and enjoyed doing. As discussed, they were making efforts to be polite within their written communications, associated with the need to receive replies and continue communicating. Further, they did not raise it as an issue that they thought their parents might be concerned about either.

Some children did however express concern about typing emails / texts. This seemed to be more associated with their actual ability to type opposed to their ability to write, as one mother and child detail in the following quote.

Mother: What about emails?

Leah: Well I only really email daddy if he is away. [...]

Mother: That's how we communicate when he is away, really. I must admit they are not very good at it. I have to push them to do it; even though it is emailing their daddy!

I: What puts you off? What might put you off doing the email to daddy?

Leah: Well, I can't really type that well.

I: So you are a bit worried about the typing?

Mother: Slow. Sometimes she is very slow and mummy takes over. Just to get it out quickly [Int: 8, 10 years].

Children's slowness or lack of typing skill was evident in another interview too. One 9 year old expressed concern about typing emails. Her mother felt that she was *getting behind* in comparison to her peers, and thus arranged with school for her to access a typing skills program [Int: 7, 9 years].

Perhaps some parents had high expectations about their children's use of mobile / internet devices. When writing emails / texts messages there are so many things that children need to think about. Parents and young people might be able to type quickly, but they have many years of experience both in writing and typing. Conversely, children are new to both these skills. They need to think very carefully about what they write and how they type, as demonstrated within the above interview [interview 8]. Typing slowly might suggest that Leah is thinking carefully about what she is doing and wants to get the message just right for her father. But if she is put under pressure to do so, as evident in the example, then she may become reluctant. Layard and Dunn (2009) in their report on contemporary childhoods have highlighted that many children are put under

pressure by parents to get everything right. But this approach may not help them to develop the skills they need, particularly communication skills, as demonstrated with Leah. There are ways around this as the second example illustrates. Parents can support children in the development of their communication skills by considering what might help them to improve. The second child learnt to email by accessing a typing skills program.

Overall, different things concern children and parents about children writing emails / texts. Children worry about the actual process of typing their messages. Parents worry about how children actually write, in an effort to ensure that emails / texts are written politely. Discussing both verbal and written communication for children on mobile / internet devices has demonstrated that they do care about how they communicate. They have fun writing polite messages and receiving replies; communicating within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 1 (immediate) with family and friends. But they do face communication challenges, which need to be supported. If children are supported by their parents it will help them to communicate politely. As the parent mediation literature recently highlights; parents and children working together (Valkenburg et al., 1999, 2013) can help children to develop these skills. Communicating politely on their devices matters to children, and they try to achieve it.

5.3 Cool communications

The next subtheme is *cool communications*. Children's thoughts about the object they use most for communication, the mobile phone is discussed. Also, the different ways children think they communicate in a *cool* way, are outlined.

Mobile / internet devices are a cool way for children to communicate. Mobile phones with internet access, smartphones such as the Apple iPhone, are considered the most desirable of devices. The expression *I want an iPhone*, was heard many times during the research. Children wanted mobile phones that

they described as *smart, quality* and looked *cool*. Children did not want to make do with the latest cheap device. Children would start to use mobiles around 9 / 10 years of age, and then usually without internet access. Parents wanted children to progress steadily with their mobile phone use. O'Neill and Dinh (2014) found similar in their research with children in the Net Children go Mobile project, regarding age of onset and types of devices used by children.

5.3.1 Cool mobiles

Cool is a term used in society by children / young people to represent a stylish object or a trendy way of behaving. The mobile phone is currently seen as a trendy stylish object by them. But as commonly associated with trends they can quickly be in and then out again, as Jack describes about his sister's mobile.

Jack: Emma used to have a phone, but now she has grown out of it, because she does not think that it looks cool any more. She's now got a new pink better one [Boy's fgp, 9 / 10 years, sister 12 years].

As Kersting (2004) outlines, children often identify themselves by what they use, which Emma might be doing with her mobile phone. She might perceive her mobile as an important part of her contemporary style. Other children felt it was important to have a cool mobile, which might be important to their contemporary style too. The Apple iPhone is seen as a cool device currently, which several of the boys wanted.

R1: I want an iPhone.

R2: Some people like prefer touch screens, rather than something which is buttons, which takes forever!

I: Touch screens are they better?

All: Yes. [Boy's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

The boys in this focus group were keen to have the latest cool device, and eagerly explained why they thought it was so cool.

Children liked to have the same device as their friends. Cool mobiles were those seen as desirable, not only by the individual child but also by his / her friends.

Greig: If your friend has got one, you really want it [Int.2, 11 years]. Having a cool mobile was important, particularly more so towards the end of middle childhood. Greig had been particularly proud of his Apple iPhone but sadly had lost it. It had been replacement with a much cheaper mobile.

Mother: That's a point because he is embarrassed about people seeing it. Because it is not posh and it is not an iPhone, and I said to him - no you are not having two phones, so...

I: ... How do you feel about not having a flash piece of kit?

Greig: Not like annoyed but hmm ... usually you would not be embarrassed to get your phone out [Int: 2, 11 years].

Greig's new mobile was not a contemporary cool one. He did not want it to be seen by others, especially his friends. To be able to communicate in a cool way, the device itself has to be cool. Greig was embarrassed because his new phone was not an iPhone, and thus not cool.

Literature supports children's ideas about cool in relation to the mobile phone. Downie and Glazebrook (2007) found in their Australian study with middle years children that they were particularly keen on what they termed the latest cool device, which happened to be a mobile phone. Similar has been found in studies with young people; they were keen to have the latest cool device which they perceived as a mobile phone, and they liked to have the same as their friends too (Fortunati, Katz & Riccini, 2003, Fortunati, 2005; Katz, 2009).

Children, similar to young people it would seem, want to communicate in ways that are considered cool by their friends. The mobile phone therefore has to look cool, so they are able to identify with their friends. Identity behaviour such as this Erikson (1963, 1968) sees as normal development at this stage. How children actually communicate needs to be perceived as cool too, as the following section demonstrates.

5.3.2 Communications have to be cool

For children their devices not only needed to look cool, but they needed to sound cool too. Children wanted to communicate in ways that enabled them to be perceived as cool by their friends. This included the use of emoticons and other imagery, the beginnings of video calling, and the use of text speak.

5.3.2.1 Text speak

As mentioned in the previous subtheme (section 5.2.2.2) children would sometimes adopt text speak in their communications. One mother, who was quite closely involved in observing her son's texts and Facebook communications noted, *Mother: Text shortenedness is taking over* [Int: 2, 11 years). Her son and his friends were using text speak. They might have been doing so because they found it an easy way to write or because they wanted to appear cool when talking with friends. When considering young people's use of text speak Ling (2007) believed that they used test speak to appear cool. Further, Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) in their study with 15 – 19 year olds in Finland found young people would apply distinctive text features within their communications to make them appear cool. Children could be doing so for the same reason.

Children themselves did not mention their use of text speak as something that mattered. However, young people did reflect on how they had used it when younger. It appears that the use of text speak was particularly common.

Gavin: If you get a text from someone who is free with text speak.

Maggie: But that is a very young thing to do. ...

Gavin: But there was a time when everyone did it. But now most people have grown out of it. And now most people write full words.

Maggie: Mmm I still write ... But when I was 14 it used to be the thing to do [Ypfgp 2, 19 - 21 years].

Text speak was reported as a behaviour that they did when younger; one that they had or were growing out of now as young people. This evidence would suggest that although text speak might be popular with children now, it seems that it may simply be a cool trend; something that children grow out of, just as young people were doing. Thus a behaviour parents did not need be too concerned about.

Text speak could be viewed as rather similar to a trend; a contemporary way to communicate that changes over time. It would seem that trends were being adopted by children, not only in relation to their objects (mobile phones) but as part of their communications too, which included their use of written language. Children's communications, along with young people's communications, at particular ages, could be described as going through phases rather similar to a fashion trend. A fashion trend comes in; it is very popular and then disappears again. Text speak could be described as similar; a fashionable trend with the use of language, particularly for the purpose of appearing cool with friends. So although parents might be worried about text speak within their children's communications now, for some children it may not be here to stay, but simply a phase. In time children may grow out of using it and return to communicating in a more usual way, as young people were doing.

Ling (2007) along with Oksman and Rautiainen (2009) found that young people follow trends in communication on their devices. Middle years children here are showing similar trends to young people with their communications, particularly as they move towards the latter end of middle childhood. Perhaps these behaviours contribute to their identity, as Ling and Helmersen (2000) suggest with young people.

5.3.2.2 Imagery within communications

Children continue to show evidence of behaviours on their devices that can be similar and different to young people. This section shows how imagery seems to play an important part of children's cool communications. Children use different types of imagery, sometimes for different reasons compared to young people.

Imagery could be included as additional features within children's messages, such as emoticons, for example. Talking about inserting emoticons into an email one boy and his mother explain together.

Mother: It has animated symbols that move. You can get funny ones that bounce up and down and stick their bottoms out, can't you? Or a great big pig that comes on and sticks its bottom out. It goes oink oink. There are different symbols. [...]

David: I like that one.

I: Do you enjoy them ...?

David: Yes, yes I do. Funny [Ypfgp 1, Boy 10 years].

In children's emails / texts they tended to use emoticons quite liberally; including lots of different brightly coloured and active emoticons within their messages. Emoticons are small pictures that can be inserted within emails / texts that summarise the sender's emotions at the time of a communication. Provine, Spencer and Mandell (2007) have described how emoticons started out with smiling faces to reflect happiness and hearts to reflect love.



Emoticons have developed much further since then to include all kinds of emotional characters. There is even one for cool. Young people in this research were active users of emoticons too. Natalie describes what she uses – *smiley faces and things like that* [Ypfgp 1]. Emoticons enhanced their messages.

Gavin: You can often get misinterpreted.

Maggie: Cause you don't have the tone of voice or anything and you might be joking. [...] Even in texting.

Gavin: The use of smiley in writing [Ypfgp 2, 19 - 21 years].

Misunderstandings could easily occur when sending emails / texts, as previously discussed by parents (section 5.2.2) too. Important cues in communication are missing – voice, gesture and expression for example, which all help to convey meaning. Young people were aware of this and wanted to avoid misunderstandings in their messages. By adding emoticons, it seemed, made up for those missing cues, thus helping to convey their meanings more clearly. This is further reinforced by Crystal (2008) who maintains that with texting the normal auditory and visual cues are missing. Provine et al. (2007) believe that emoticons are able to demonstrate the affect needed within emails / texts messages. Literature therefore reinforces the use of emoticons in messages to enhance meaning.

For children emoticons were used in a slightly different way; they appeared to be used primarily for fun. Children enjoyed the novelty of emoticons and the fun of sending them. Children seemed to feel that emoticons were a cool and fun way to communicate, as they did other imagery. Children would use pictures, drawings and sometimes photographs to make their messages fun and cool. For example, *Billy: There is a gallery and gallery 2 with pretty pictures. I just mess around with it. It is cool* [Int: 5, 10 years], describing how he uses imagery within his communications. Another child discusses how she uses photographs.

R: My sister is doing a job in France, so I like to text her. She can send me pictures of her job. And I can send her pictures of what I am doing [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

Children were interested in exploring and trying to be creative with different forms of imagery within their communications.

Vanessa: You can go on Face Time, where you get to see their face and that. You can do graffiti on it too. ... And then you put words and pictures around it. ... You can get like pictures of flowers [Int: 6, 12 years].

Compared to young people, children seemed more interested in being creative with their communications on their devices. Children were learning to be creative with their writing by adding imagery. Similar to young people they were including photographs in their messages, as young people might do with social networking, Facebook for example. However, children were experimenting with pictures and drawings in creative ways. It shows how confident children were becoming in communicating via mobiles / internet devices. Although children were using them at a young age, they seemed to be adapting to these devices quickly and skillfully.

Children are demonstrating enthusiasm for making their communications creative; using emoticons, as well as other imagery. Children appear to be adopting a broad range of skills when communicating on their devices. An observation which Ofcom (2013) has also recently noted. Emoticons were popular and might be something children would continue to use on their devices as they became older. Young people in this research were keen to continue using them. Further, children were really enjoying using emoticons within their communications, although for different reasons compared to young people. A trend that may continue, unlike text speak perhaps.

5.3.2.3 Other cool ways to communicate – be creative

Children would also communicate in other cool ways. Video calling was just catching on. Leah, with support from her mother, outlined how she had used it.

Mother: You communicate with [friend]. How do you do that?

Leah: On the iPod touch and Face Time.

I: ... Tell me about Face Time?

Leah: [...] You only get the people that you want to have on it.

I: And what do you do with Face Time?

Leah: Well, you get to speak to them in Face.

Mother: Like a phone but it is free.

I: It is like a phone with a picture? Is it a bit like Skype?

Leah: Yeah. But [friend] does it through ...

Mother: She does it through her iPad [Int: 8, 10 years].

Children found Face Time fun and they were able to access it from different devices – iPods, iPhones and iPads. With Face Time children seemed to be able to overcome some of the difficulties associated with emailing / texting. Visual cues and auditory cues were present, all helping to enhance their communication experience. Vlahovic, Roberts and Dunbar (2012) have looked at different modes of communication, and found greater satisfaction was achieved by young people with video calling (Skype) and phone calls, rather than other forms of communication via mobile / internet devices. The researchers felt that visual cues and auditory cues were contributing to this. The same might be happening with children.

Cool communications could occur creatively on the internet too. For 9 year old Lilly-Mae communicating on the internet had provided her with the opportunity to be seen on children's television by her friends.

I: So they have seen themselves on the television. What did that feel like?

Lilly-Mae: Awesome. And when I showed it to the class I was like – oh this is really embarrassing [Int: 7, 9 years].

Lilly-Mae had played the television program back to her classmates (via iPlayer). The internet was providing an exciting opportunity for her to communicate creatively, but in a somewhat different way to what might normally be

associated with the internet. In the program Lilly-Mae was singing and dancing with her sister. Her mother had videoed them and emailed it to the television program. The video had thus provided Lilly-Mae with the opportunity to be seen by others on television; communicating to a wide audience. She had been able to cross some of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings and communicate to a wide social audience; contributing culturally (social settings 4).

A further example was provided by Lilly-Mae about communicating in a cool creative way, but this time on the radio.

Mother: And then you were on the x show [famous celebrity].

Lilly-Mae: Yes, I was on the radio.

Mother: On his radio show. So the computer allowed us to go back and play it on iPlayer. [...]

*Lilly-Mae: Cause I did it about getting my new glasses. [...]
And so I ... and so I ... in the end he asked me if he could
get a picture of me with my signature on with my glasses.*

I: Yes, because he has got cool glasses too [Int: 7, 9 years].

Here again Lilly-Mae crosses different social settings and is communicating within settings that might not be expected for a 9 year old - Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 4 (culture). This time she communicates with someone from celebrity culture and is able to share this experience with friends via iPlayer.

Lilly-Mae, at 9 years old, uses the internet, and other forms of social media, to communicate in cool and creative ways. Children can do this now, which was not available to them so easily in the past. With some help and support children can be innovative with their communications; mobile phones and the internet providing opportunities which previous generations would not have been able to experience with such ease. Video communications have been around for some time, but not in the accessible form they now exist. From a child development perspective, children's social development seems to be evolving in new ways to overcome some of the social barriers that might exist within the settings

Bronfenbrenner (1979) discusses. Children are accessing these settings at a younger age, due to the ease of access provided by the internet, along with their creative thinking. As Vincent (2015) discusses children go beyond the boundaries of their own knowledge.

Face Time and Skype (video calling) include auditory and visual cues, which emails / texts lack. Researchers have found that non-verbal cues (expressions and gestures) are particularly important to children's communications, more so than adults (Ling & Helmersen, 2000; Oksman & Rautiainen, 2009). In this research too children were attracted to devices which facilitate non-verbal cues in helping them to understand their communications with others.

Overall, children love to communicate in different ways on their mobile devices, particularly in creative ways, perhaps more so than young people. Some children interviewed were doing so with confidence, taking themselves beyond their boundaries of knowledge. For others their communications needed to be perceived as cool by their friends; the devices they use along with the communications they make, showing similarities to young people as they approach the latter end of middle childhood. Importantly, this section shows how children's communications can be positive for their development, particularly with parental support, as the special cohort learn to be creative on their devices.

5.4 Impolite: Receiving negative communications

There were different aspects of *appropriate communications* which, when pulled together, seemed to reflect children's dissatisfaction with their communications on mobiles / internet devices. These came to be referred to as *impolite* or *negative communications*. Children interviewed had experienced them, witnessed them, or heard accounts from others.

Impolite has been defined as – *not polite or rude* (Collins, 2012). In this context impolite refers to different types of communication on mobile / internet devices which children perceived as negative. By characterizing how children thought they and others should not communicate, provided more informed insights into their thoughts about communicating appropriately. Using *appropriate communications* as a theme and including *impolite* as a subtheme has helped to interpret children's meanings, as part of this thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Importantly too, the realities of those meanings can be carefully considered (Maxwell, 2012).

Children wanted to communicate politely and were concerned when others did not communicate politely with them. For example, talking about being spoken to impolitely on a social networking site, Gareth described how he reported others for this behaviour. *Gareth: Or you can either say [to the moderator] that there is a rude word and it is offensive [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years]*. Children had also heard about others saying inappropriate things, Gareth again.

Gareth: One of my mum's friend's, her daughter kept letting all her friends use her phone. ... And suddenly the mum and the daughter kept getting all these messages from all these different people saying naughty stuff and stuff like that [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

What the naughty stuff was Gareth did not mention, but he was showing an awareness of impolite communications on mobile phones. Gareth was conveying in a sense that he did not approve of this.

On reflection, within the focus groups and interviews it was possible that children were trying to give me a good impression about their own communication behaviours. However, I felt children appeared to be genuinely trying to convey that they did not like the communication behaviours of some individuals they encountered on their devices and were careful in how they communicated themselves; not wanting to communicate impolitely. Charlton et al. (2002) and Davie et al. (2004) in their interviews with 10 / 11 year olds found that they also

received impolite messages from others via their mobile phones, but did not describe in any detail about these communications or what children did about them. The following sections explore impolite communications; negative and sometimes bullying communications received by children and what they did about them.

5.4.1 Negative communications

Initially, negative communications are discussed. Negative communications for children included accessing inappropriate materials and receiving unkind / rude messages. There was a definite sense from children that this was not appropriate.

5.4.1.1 Accessing inappropriate materials

Children's descriptions of negative communications included others engaging in activities on the internet which might be deemed inappropriate, as Jack reports. *Jack: Cause people can download things from the internet that are not appropriate. Think that stuff is funny when it isn't* [Boys fgp, 9 / 10 years]. Here, Jack was talking about children downloading inappropriate images from YouTube and sending them to others. This is similar to reports from Charlton et al. (2002), where they found children were receiving inappropriate and offensive materials. Byron (2008), and Livingstone and Helsper (2013) have also talked about children being able to easily access materials online that are not age-appropriate. They have called for restrictions to be put in place. The media frequently discuss this subject and express concern about its impact on children's development (Levy, 2013). Legislation has now been put in place, as outlined in chapter 2 (Department of Education, 2012a, 2012b), to help support parents with the restriction of children's access to such materials, through the use of parental controls.

Participating parents were concerned too that their children might be able to access inappropriate materials via the internet.

Father: I think it is something to do with society now, where people feel that they have to publicise everything on some social networking site. And you would be amazed at the sort of things they put on. [...] Yeah; it can even go as far as pornographic [Int: 2, 11 years].

Other materials that concerned parents included gossip about friends and inappropriate messages from strangers. Participating children felt accessing such materials as inappropriate. They did not engage in it themselves but were aware of others who did. Research by Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015) found similar evidence; where children avoided accessing such materials.

5.4.1.2 Receiving negative communications

Negative communications also mentioned by children included receiving rude comments from others, especially on social networking sites. Some children interviewed seemed to spend lengthy periods of time on these sites, which other researchers have also found (Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015). They would mainly speak with others they knew, but sometimes they would speak with others that they did not know. Club Penguin was a popular site, accessed by many.

R: I go on this website; it's called like Club Penguin.

I: Oh yes, I think I have heard of that. What do you do on Club Penguin?

R: It is like an online website where you can like make friends and talk [Boys' fgp, 9 / 10 years].

Some children had actually experienced negative communications such as rude comments being made on this website, as Gareth reports.

Gareth: On Club Penguin if anyone says like anything that- that is nasty to you, which sort of scares you or something- the moderators like will check the sites. ... Or you can either say that there is a rude word [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

A similar story was reported in another focus group.

Jack: And if someone is mean to you, mmm, you sort of moderate it. There is like a moderator on it. If someone is like mean to another person or you, then you can click on them and report them. And the computer will check through their writing [Boys' fgp, 9/10 years].

Despite rude comments being made, from the above examples, it would seem that these boys were confident and knew how to handle themselves. They knew their way around Club Penguin and were able to engage the moderator for help. The moderator would check their concerns, particularly rude comments, and action would be taken if their claims were substantiated.

So despite children encountering rude comments from others, they seem quite able to manage such situations. Children do not seem distressed by it either. In fact they are not prepared to let others get away with it. Ofcom (2012a) has found similar results; children were able to handle themselves on social networking websites, much more confidently than parents and others might imagine. It is similar in this research too; children might be learning to use mobile / internet devices at a young age, but as a result of these experiences, they are able to confidently question and report negative communications that concern them.

Overall, it would seem that children interviewed felt that negative communications on mobile / internet devices were inappropriate, which included being sent rude messages and materials. So although parents have concerns about children accessing the internet, some children are learning the skills necessary to manage their way around age-appropriate social networking sites and deal with negative communications. Yet there will be others who may not be so confident and are upset by these experiences, as O'Neill and Dinh

(2014) highlighted in relation to the 9 / 10 years olds they questioned. So the situation may vary, with some children being less confident. The consequences of which will be discussed later in the subtheme.

Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) and Boyd (2014) in their research with young people found similar to the research here; where they were accessing mobile / internet devices many learnt how to use them in a smart way. The findings here provide similar details on how children are behaving smartly on their devices, as the following section discusses further.

5.4.1.3 Dealing with negative communications

Children did mention that when they encountered negative communications on social networking sites for example, they would ask the moderator or seek parental advice, which Hasebrink et al. (2011) has also found. Gareth reports on how his brother had experienced difficulties.

Gareth: My mum she emailed Club Penguin, to get an email back of what my brother had said. My mum knew that it was not him because he had not been on it. We got an email list of what he had said. It was someone else [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

It would seem that some children would not give up when something had gone wrong. Importantly, they were able to recognize their limitations. Yet, Healy and Anderson (2007) found in their research with 10 and 11 year olds that they tended to over-estimate their abilities at managing difficulties on social networking sites. The evidence here is contrary; children tried to solve the problem themselves and if they experienced difficulties they would seek help from others, behaving smartly.

Young people's thoughts about negative communications were slightly different. They too commented on the behaviour of others but their discussions centred on teenage girls, in particular, behaving inappropriately. Young people reported

that some teenage girls were leaving themselves open to quite public exposure on social networking sites. This could lead to contact from strangers. Young people emphasized when using social networking, sites such as Facebook, that it was essential to keep one's settings private, to avoid this.

Maggie: They can't see anything, cause I have set it completely to private. [...] But sometimes some girls are a bit stupid and they don't. And that is their own fault. They are quite aware of how to set it to private. It is stupid because they don't set it to the most private setting they can [Ypfgp 2, 19 - 21 years].

So for young people, certainly girls, it was important to protect themselves from strangers. Failure to do so, could potentially lead to difficulties. Children interviewed did not experience this as generally they were not accessing the same social networking sites as young people. Although, there was evidence of children being contacted inappropriately by strangers. In contrast to the above quote, they were very aware of the need to protect themselves.

Fiona: Once on Club Penguin there was this person who kept saying, who kept saying - where do you live, where do you live and stuff like that? I just ignored them. They kept saying it. No one else says that. They should not have been saying that [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

Children did sometimes receive negative communications. However, they were definitely keen to stop these communications from occurring, and would take action if and when they received them. Children in this research thought smartly about what action they should take.

However, other research has shown that children do not always cope as well as they think they can in dealing with negative communications (Healy & Anderson, 2007), including not protecting themselves as well as they should (Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015). Once again this suggests that children might vary in their ability to cope with such situations, which parents must be aware. Children in this research were coping well; suggesting that support from parents, and perhaps school too, were helping them to cope with negative

communications on mobile / internet devices, as later explored. But without that support there might be risks for children receiving negative communications and not knowing how to deal with them.

5.4.2 Bullying communications

Research has shown that children during middle years can sometimes receive bullying communications. If this occurs it is more towards the latter end of middle childhood (see O'Neill & Dinh, 2014). These researchers found that children did not cope well, while young people were more competent at managing such situations.

5.4.2.1 Cyberbullying

Bullying in the form of cyberbullying was a further impolite communication highlighted by children interviewed, but only briefly. Cyberbullying, as previously mentioned, is a problem that children / young people may encounter on their devices. Belsey (2005) states that cyberbullying involves the use of devices to support hostile behaviour that it is intended to harm and hurt others. Researchers report that it is a growing problem (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvaihio & Tippett, 2006; Cassidy, Jackson & Brown, 2009), and is especially unkind. Haddon and Vincent (2015) found that it was a problem for some children / young people they interviewed within the UK Net Children go Mobile project.

Within children's discussions here they did touch on some elements of cyberbullying, but not to the extent that literature might suggest. One child provided an example of a cyberbullying communication, which clearly demonstrates the type of unkind message that may be sent.

Zac: And then you could look at other people's Facebook pages and you could say – Oh Zac really smelt in class today or something. Or Zac messed up in class today. You would see it on their page [Int: 3, 11 years].

Whether Zac had experienced this type of communication from someone or was simply trying to provide an example, is uncertain. He clearly provides details of what a cyberbullying communication would look like and where it might be found; a social networking site.

Zac was describing what he understood as a cyberbullying communication that might occur on a social networking site. Significantly, he illustrates that it is not just the individual who receives the message that sees it, but many others see it too. This makes cyberbullying a very public experience. Researchers have studied cyberbullying and highlight its very public nature (Belsey, 2005; Campbell, 2005, Campbell et al., 2012). This can have the impact of making a child feel extremely unhappy (Campbell et al., 2012).

Many cyberbullying messages can be text based (Dooley, Pyżalski & Cross, 2009). As well as Zac's example, other children provided examples of text based communications that were not exactly cyberbullying but certainly harassing in nature. If these were to become persistent then they might be considered as cyberbullying. However, once again, children knew they were not appropriate messages and seemed able to fend them off. For example some children reported that they were asked personal questions on social networking sites, which they felt uncomfortable about and thought of as impolite. *R: One time this penguin said to me – where do you live, where do you live? I said in an igloo! [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].* In this account the child uses humour to deflect an awkward situation. In the following example the child simply ignores the personal question. *Fiona: Once on Club Penguin there was this person who kept saying ... where do you live? ... I just ignored them [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].* Children were also aware of how to use the safety features on their computer to avoid harassing situations.

Nicky: I don't know how but I have got my email and since I got my email address there are about three people who I don't know, who email me. I have to block them and things [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

In this example the child blocks the unidentified persistent individuals. Within the final example, the child is on a social networking site and encounters some problems. *Gareth: ... Scan through their writing, conversation, and then if anything is bad, then they can get banned for 24 hours or something.* Here Gareth describes how he uses the game moderator to help him.

Overall, children interviewed had learnt a variety of different strategies to help keep themselves safe online. They had learnt that it was not appropriate to communicate with strangers, particularly those who asked for personal details or said offensive things and harassed them. Importantly, they seemed able to fend off situations that might potentially become bullying in nature. These children were capable of handling themselves online and keeping themselves safe, thus reducing the risks of cyberbullying occurring. When asked, children identified that they had learnt their safety skills from personal experience, as well as parents and lessons in school; all warning them not to disclose personal information online to strangers. Some children did talk about courses they had accessed at school, such as the DARE program, which gave them advice about staying safe online and safety with mobile phones (Int: 2 and 3). Within literature, the Girls' Schools Association (2011) for example, has looked at these issues. They discuss the importance of girls not divulging personal information to strangers, and particularly stress the importance of schools and parents reinforcing this. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social setting 2; parents and schools working together to support children's development.

Some children are thinking seriously about staying safe online. When children encounter difficulties, where others are not communicating appropriately with them, they apply strategies they have learnt to overcome these difficulties. On the whole little evidence was revealed about cyberbullying directly, although there was some evidence of children receiving harassing messages from others,

particularly from people they did not know, wanting personal information. Yet, children were well able to cope and fend off these intrusive messages. So although literature highlights cyberbullying as a significant concern for children / young people (Smith et al., 2006; Cassidy et al., 2009), it was not the situation for this sample of children. Cyberbullying may not be as prevalent as researchers suggest; at least not for some middle years children (9 / 10 year olds for example) who have learnt how to handle themselves competently online, with support. However this may not be the situation for all children of this age (see O'Neill & Dinh, 2014). Some are exposed to cyberbullying and find it a difficult and persistent problem to cope with, as later discussed. The cohort's behaviour was similar to young people, who as some research has shown are able to cope with difficult situations on their devices (O'Neill & Dinh, 2014).

5.4.2.2 Sending negative communications

Reflecting on children's talk, although they discussed receiving negative messages, they did not mention about sending such messages themselves. Receiving negative messages annoyed them. But I could not naturally assume that they did not engage in such activities themselves. However, looking further into children's views there appeared little evidence of negative messages being sent by them. In fact the opposite seemed to be true. As previously highlighted (section 5.2); children felt it was important to be polite. Children were quite cautious about what they said on their mobile / internet devices, and were careful to ensure they did not say anything that would upset others. *Fiona: About being careful about what you say, so that you don't say anything that will make anyone upset [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].*

However, one child did mention that she was aware of a situation which she had observed, where cyberbullying was taking place; unkind messages being sent by one child about others. She was aware of someone who did engage in online bullying behaviours.

R: My friend at school was being sent unkind messages by a friend ... about her and another girl. [...] So in the end my friend blocked her [Int: 3, 11 years].

In this quote the child featured feels that the message should not have been sent. She blocks the sender, ensuring that she does not receive any further messages. Children do recognise when unkind bullying messages are being sent. Yet again, they are not afraid to take corrective action. The child uses her safety skills to stop these impolite messages.

In another example one child did report that she fell out with her friend and that they had argued publicly via Facebook, as the following illustrates.

Vanessa: Once I had ere, an argument with my friend.

I: How did that feel, doing it online, having that disagreement?

Vanessa: A bit weird. ... It made me feel like I could say things without her saying like different things. And like ... but ... the weird thing was I did not know what she was feeling.

I: Did you make it up soon after that?

Vanessa: Ere, a little bit [Int: 6, 12 years].

The relationship between them although re-established appears weak. The outcome for the girls perhaps might have been different, if the argument had occurred privately and not on Facebook. Yet the argument was made public; lots of children knowing about it when they did not really need to know, which Zac highlighted earlier.

A lack of visual cues could have influenced the progress of this argument. As the friend's reactions to particular points could not be determined visually, Vanessa is not quite certain how her friend is feeling, and is thus able to continue confidently with what she wants to say. As researchers have highlighted, and within this research too, visual cues are particularly important for children in their communications on these devices (Oksman & Rautiainen, 2009). This might be because they are still learning about the communication process, and really

need those cues to understand situations. As evidenced earlier, children are drawn towards devices which provide these important visual cues (5.3.2.2), such as video calling (Face Time). Vanessa's difficulties highlight what can happen when visual cues are not present.

The above quotes were the only evidence of children encountering incidents that might be considered cyberbullying. However, there appeared to be very little gain in doing so, and some evidence of regret, as apparent in Vanesa's situation. Within the focus groups interviews with young people they said that - *there is a lot of cyberbullying* [Ypfgp 1 – 3], referring to social networking sites. However, they did not mention that they had experienced it themselves. Overall, within this research, evidence was low on cyberbullying in comparison to what literature suggests. Cyberbullying is a concern expressed within much of the literature (Ofcom, 2005 - 2014; Campbell, 2005; Byron, 2008; O' Moore, 2012, Hasebrink et al., 2011, Smahel & Wright, 2014). Specifically in relation to children's use it is mentioned by Charlton et al. (2002), Davie et al. (2004), and the Net Children go Mobile project (O'Neill & Dinh, 2014; Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015). It was not raised very much by children within this research. Receiving more mildly harassing communications was apparent, which children felt able to handle.

Although cyberbullying might not be a problem for some children, as generally observed here, that is not the situation for all children / young people. There are some who do experience cyberbullying. However, perhaps some of them have difficulty in handling the mildly harassing messages discussed here, and thus as a result these messages become more persistent and eventually bullying in nature. Undeniably, there are other types of messages that are clearly of a cyberbullying nature that children / young people might receive and would be difficult for anyone to endure. In extreme situations this can result in a child / young person becoming unwell, due to the stress caused. In really extreme situations tragically the child / young person can no longer cope with the torment, as the case of Phoebe Prince so vividly illustrates. Phoebe was 15 years old and killed herself as

a result of persistent cyberbullying via emails / texts, received from other children at her school (Daily Mail, 2010). Cyberbullying is undoubtedly a cruel and dangerous form of communication.

Might in be better, in some situations, to talk in terms of harassing messages, rather than cyberbullying. This might depict a more accurate assessment of the situation for children in general. Cyberbullying as a term is used too liberally perhaps. Cyberbullying seems to have a set of distinct characteristics, which are different from the more common harassing messages children might receive. Cyberbullying messages are very cruel and very persistent, as the above example illustrates, which harassing messages are not. Teaching children safety skills can help them deal with these harassing messages, so they do not develop into cyberbullying.

From the literature explored there were concerns about children using mobile / internet devices at a young age (Ling and Helmersen, 2000; O'Neill & Dinh, 2014). However, from exploring children's views here they were more careful and considerate when communicating on their devices than parents realised. They were trying to communicate politely. One concern parents had particularly was bullying. Bullying or cyberbullying was not really a problem for this cohort. This research has produced different findings from others, which may in part be due to focusing specifically on middle years children, and not considering them together with older age groups.

5.5 Conclusions

Chapter 5 has presented an analysis of views from participating children about their mobile / internet devices. The theme of *appropriate communications* highlights a context for children's development. This context provides a way of understanding what is important to children about their devices, part of which is about communicating appropriately with others. It has been developed in

response to the research question - *What do mobile phones / internet devices mean to children (7 - 12 years) within their lives, as described by children themselves?*

The theme particularly highlights what children understand about communication when thinking about their own communications on mobile / internet devices. The sub-theme *being polite* for example shows the effort children were making to ensure they were being polite rather than impolite to others. This might in fact be the reality for many middle years children, not just those participating in this research; they receive and send polite messages to each other via their devices. Where this does not occur, mildly harassing messages may be more commonly received rather than messages which are cyberbullying in nature. Further, as the subtheme *impolite* shows, occasionally, without appropriate visual or auditory cues, children forget to think carefully enough about what they are saying to others, and what impact it might have. Where one or other of these cues does not exist children sometimes lose sight of reality; forgetting about the feelings of others, and replying inappropriately. Suggesting that visual and auditory cues are especially important for children when learning to communicate on mobile / internet devices, as they are still learning social skills. Visual and auditory cues support children's communications on these devices.

Appropriate communications showed that reality for children when communicating on their devices may be simpler than parents think. They want to communicate appropriately, but just like many young people and parents, sometimes they get it wrong. But these situations may be less frequent than parents think, particularly where children have learnt how to manage their communications safely and appropriately, as this cohort had. Children were communicating within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) different social settings; social settings 1 - family and friends, social settings 2 - links between home and school. They were also learning how to communicate beyond their usual social settings; social settings 4, celebrity culture particularly interested some. The quotes from

one child Lilly-Mae (section 5.3.2.3) show what it must have meant to her to be able to communicate with celebrities, her role models (Bandura, 1977), and share those communications with others. Having these important social interactions would help Lilly-Mae's social development; giving her more social confidence.

Overall, the theme demonstrates that in comparison to young people, children's social behaviours on their devices shows similarities and differences. Sometimes children would behave in a less mature way than young people, which would be expected as children are younger. Sometimes children's behaviours were the same as young people's behaviours, or occasionally even more mature. Examples for each will be provided. Behaving in a less mature way; children would demonstrate limited use of their devices, not really showing much skill and performing limited functions. Yet other children, who were behaving in a similar way to young people, were trying to be *cool* by owning fashionable devices and communicating in ways that their friends would perceive as *cool*. Some children demonstrated they were able to use their devices in an even more mature way than some young people. These children were considerate of others around them when communicating in public for example, as Rachel demonstrated (section 5.2.1). As literature shows (Plant, 2000) some young people when they first started to use their devices they were not able to understand the need to be considerate. Overall, middle years children were sometimes similar and sometimes different compared to young people in their social behaviours on mobile / internet devices. Parents were mostly supportive of children's use of their devices, helping this cohort of children to communicate politely and considerately. These values were important to parents, perhaps part of what they saw as good parenting.

Parents' concerns about this cohort of children communicating on their devices at such a young age were evident. Parents' concerns were different from children's concerns; children were concerned about typing their messages, whereas parents were concerned about the use of text speak. Yet these were

all issues that had practical solutions or would resolve over time, as the evidence shows from young people. There were no serious issues about this cohort of children using their devices at a young age, as long as they were supported appropriately by their parents.

The theme *appropriate communications*, in exploring the meaning of children's (7 – 12 years) devices, will form part of a framework on children's mobile / internet behaviours. The framework will be designed to help psychologists learn and understand children's current behaviours. The subthemes which make up the theme *appropriate communications* could be used as a basis by psychologists to create psychological tools for measuring children's behaviours. As an example the subtheme *cool* will be discussed.

Some children interviewed did not behave in a *cool* way. Others were using *cool* behaviours with their devices. These children considered when it was appropriate to behave in a *cool* way, usually with friends but not with others such as parents and teachers. Rather similar to young people, they saw *cool* as an important part of using their devices. Developing descriptors of *cool* and *uncool* behaviours on mobile / internet devices and placing them into different phases of children's communication on these devices, may help psychologists understand how children are developing at this time. For middle years children *cool* is something they are just learning to do, whereas young people may be well versed in it, as *cool* is part of their culture and identity. Different descriptors of *cool* or *uncool* could be created as part of a psychological tool assessing children's behaviours.

Adapting the themes and subthemes as part of a psychological tool for measuring and thus understanding children's behaviours with their devices, could be a potential use for the framework. Different measures could be created which would provide details about where children's use of their devices may sit in relation to others within their age group and other age groups, thus establishing norms for children's use of mobile / internet devices. These ideas will

be discussed further at the end of the next chapter, highlighting how other themes and subthemes within the research could be adapted in this way, forming part of the framework and then become developed as a psychological tool.

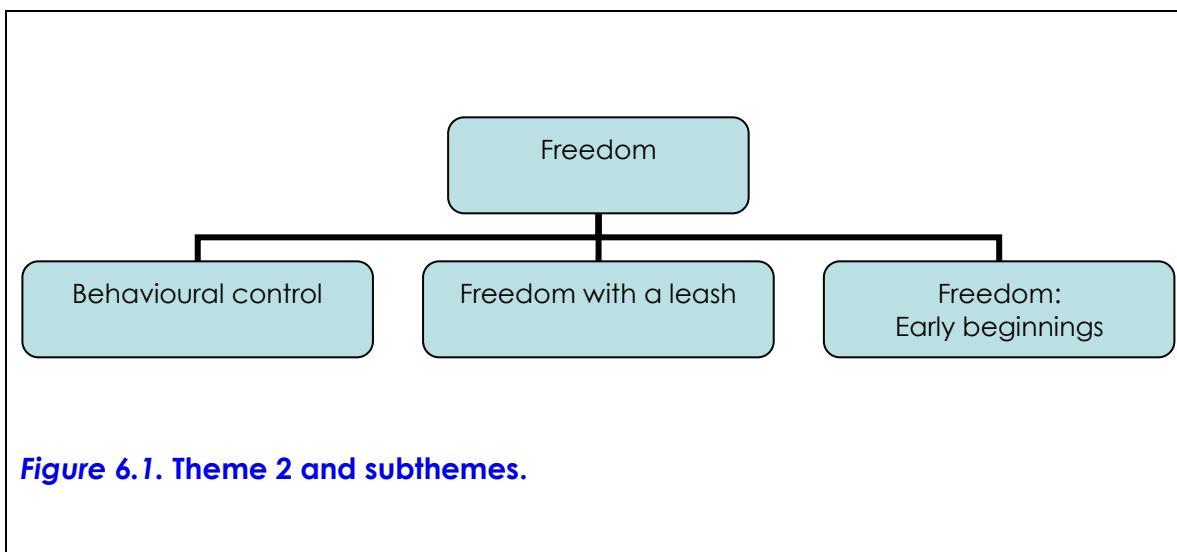
Chapter 5 has presented a context for children's communications and social behaviours. It has shown that their behaviours on mobile / internet devices can be polite, and they can use them safely, despite being young. Support from parents helps this to develop. Thus claims from literature emphasizing negative communications are not always correct; at least for this cohort. The next chapter will look further at the meaning of these devices for children. Communicating appropriately was important to them, but there was also something else, as the next chapter shows. Children wanted to develop some independence with mobile / internet devices assisting in the process, but parents were not always supportive.

Chapter 6: Theme 2 Children's views – Freedom

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 presents the second theme, addressing the research question – *What do mobile phones / internet devices mean to children (7 - 12 years) within their lives, as described by children themselves?* Children's experiences are again compared with young people. Theme 2, *Freedom*, describes the different phases of freedom to emerge during middle childhood, with children being given increasing levels of freedom as they become older. Freedom, as a developmental process is presented, illustrating its important link with mobile / internet devices in children's lives, as evidenced through this cohort of children.

Freedom for children consisted of three phases during middle childhood – *behavioural control*, *freedom with a leash (metaphorical leash)*, and *freedom: early beginnings*. These phases will be presented as three distinct subthemes (Figure 6.1). The second phase, *freedom with a leash*, will be presented first, as this was the phase of freedom most commonly associated with middle childhood. Each subtheme will be considered in terms of children's outdoor play behaviours (*playing out*) and their interactions with others (*social interactions*), as these were the aspects of behaviour children most commonly discussed which linked to freedom. Freedom for this cohort of children was an evolving concept. There were patterns emerging, which demonstrated tight controls initially, but with a gradual lessening of those controls by parents, and more freedoms starting to emerge.



6.2 Freedom with a leash (Metaphorical leash)

6.2.1 What is freedom for children?

Freedom as a term itself does not have one clear definition, but is associated with similar but slightly different notions. These include unrestricted behaviour, liberty, and self-determination (Oxford English Dictionary, 2011; Collins Dictionary, 2012), for example. In relation to middle years (7 - 12 years) children, in general their behaviour cannot be completely free or unrestricted. They are young and not mature enough to care for themselves. They have strong attachments to their parents. Parents need to care and support them, as well as mediate their behaviours. As Erikson (1963) and other researchers (Collins et al., 2012) have identified, children start to develop more independent behaviours as they become older; thinking more independently and relying less on their parents. The theme *freedom with a leash* demonstrates the beginnings of this process.

6.2.2 Outdoor play and social interactions

To accommodate children's need for freedom some parents provide them with a mobile phone to help them stay safe. The mobile phone is available to support children's freedoms; *behaviourally* and *socially*. However, the mobile phone can become rather similar to a leash in its function. Parents are able to monitor and check what their children are doing.

6.2.2.1 Outdoor play

Within the focus groups and interviews some parents were really keen that their children should have a mobile phone with them for reasons of safety. One boy noted the following about the mobile phone. *R: When I get the bus for school my mum will want me to take it for emergencies* [Boys' fgp, 9 / 10 years].

Generally, children were in support of this; they agreed that safety was an important reason for having a mobile. However, the kudos of actually having a really cool device was important to them too. They were proud of their mobiles, as evidenced from discussion in the previous chapter (section 5.3).

Some families were very safety aware, to such an extent that they put in place a system for emergencies, using the mobile as a resource for contact.

Jack: Say you are in trouble. My dad said, say when you get a phone, on my contacts list I will have my mum and my dad, it will say ICE. ICE means in case of emergencies. So if I get injured someone could look at the phone, they know that ICE means in case of emergency, so they would know [Boys' fgp, 9 / 10 years].

Here, there is evidence of family policy in relation to emergency situations. A recent article highlights the growing significance of the term ICE, in just these circumstances. In an accident a paramedic will use a patient's mobile to contact next of kin for health information. By searching for ICE in the contacts list

of the patient's mobile, next of kin will be identified and contacted (Brotchie, 2013). It appears that the use of ICE as a term is growing in significance as part of family policy on safety with children and mobile phones. Maintaining contact with family is important, particularly if a child finds themselves in difficulties away from home. The mobile can be crucial, especially in emergencies.

The following describes in detail how the mobile also becomes rather similar to a leash in its function within the relationship between children and their parents, in an effort by parents to keep children safe. The term *metaphorical leash* actually arose from a discussion with a mother in one of the interviews. She referred to the mobile as a leash for monitoring her son's behaviour. She then went on to discuss its role as a monitoring device.

I: You seem to use it more like a safety device?

*Mother: Not even an emergency but a safety device.
As a, as a metaphorical, for me it is a metaphorical leash
that I can use at a given moment [Int: 2, 11 years].*

The following describes in detail how the leash was used.

*Mother: So I will just pop him a call – where are you?
I will do a check. And I think Greig knows that without me
being able to pop him a call he would not get that leash
stretched so long. So he gets a longer leash with having the
phone. That phone is in his pocket, answering it when it rings.
There is no way he could go down to the skate park unless I
could phone and say, are you okay Greig [Int: 2, 11 years]?*

The mobile was not a real leash, but as described a metaphorical one; it acted as a leash. The term leash is commonly used in relation to walking a dog (Collins Dictionary, 2012). A leash allows the dog some freedom, but in a controlled way; helping to monitor the dog's behaviour. Freedoms are given but in a restricted way; control is almost always present. The term leash has previously been used in relation to parents monitoring young people's behaviour via mobile / internet devices (Ling, 1999; Haddon & Vincent, 2014).

The mobile certainly seemed to resemble a leash in its function, not in a physical way, but in a psychological way. As long as the child answered the mobile when mother called, all was well. Mother was reassured and the child could continue to have his freedoms. The mobile phone, as a leash, was there to monitor the child's freedoms by keeping his behaviours in check. Children's freedoms seemed to depend on the mobile phone acting in this way. A further example is presented from one of the focus groups.

Mother: For me the most important thing is safety. We have just bought a mobile phone for David. For me the reason was safety, because he has just started to meet his friends in the park and to bike in the village. For safety – if he needs anything he can phone. Wherever he is I can go and get him. Then I know that he is safe. The mobile phone is enabling him to do more. It is allowing him to have more freedom, to stretch his legs. He is now 10 years old, so he is wanting to go. [...] If I rang him and he did not answer, I would be off down the road looking for him. Immediately [Ypfgp1, 14 - 16 years, including a 10 year old].

The mobile was allowing some children interviewed, particularly boys, to be doing much more; to enjoy the freedom of being out with their friends. By having the mobile parents could be reassured that their children were safe. Importantly, parents needed to have the ability to contact their children when away from them. The notion of close connection emerges here too; being able to contact and make that connection. As one mother describes it in one interview; *Mother: To feel that you are still connected to him, but you are not with him* [Int: 3, 11 years]. The mobile was importantly providing this reassurance for parents.

Children felt that it was necessary to have this close connection too, as 12 year old Janie describes in her interview.

Janie: [...] Like if I am in town, and I have missed a bus or something, or got lost. Then I need mum to come and pick me up. I just ring my mum up and she will just come and get me [Int: 1, 12 years].

Here, Janie knows that the connection with her mother is always in place. If she calls, her mother will respond. Looking at young people's views similar evidence was found about maintaining this close connection. Young people felt it was important, to such an extent that they would not go out without their mobile, as one young person describes.

R: Mmm I like the fact that when I go out I have got my phone and know that if anything was wrong I would be able to contact home or friends [Ypfgp 1, 14 - 16 years].

However, for young people it was not really a leash; parents did not monitor in the same way as they did with middle years children; there were differences. Young people had more responsibility for themselves and it was not just parents they could contact for help, it was friends too.

Within the literature young people's relationship with the mobile phone and their parents has been explained through the umbilical cord metaphor (Ling, 2004). The mobile phone is constructed as a functional umbilical cord, which connects parents and young people, helping to keep them safe (Ling, 2007). Presumably, it loosens and eventually falls off as with normal healthy psychological separation between parents and young people.

Ribak (2009) has looked at this metaphor further, and she describes a process whereby young people have the possibility of calling parents, if a need arises. They are linked as an umbilical cord would suggest, but it is more about having the potential to contact, rather than actually contacting. The umbilical cord metaphor does not seem to be a process of monitoring, as it is with children, parents and the *metaphorical leash*. The leash carries notions of control to prevent inappropriate behaviour and to keep the child safe. There are differences between the two metaphors which describe children's / young people's use of the mobile phone, and their relationship or attachment to parents. As children start to use the mobile phone at a much younger age than young people first did, it is used in a different way, certainly in the beginning.

During middle childhood the mobile phone operates as a leash, because parents need the connection to check and monitor children's behaviour. Therefore the *metaphorical leash* metaphor is appropriate at this stage of childhood.

However with young people, the umbilical cord metaphor seems more appropriate, as the following illustrates. With young people the possibility of contact is there if needed. The connection is not always needed and sometimes there may be no connection at all. Eventually, as with an umbilical cord, the young person psychologically separates from their parents; there is no longer the need to connect with parents in the same way as before, as the young person has reached young adulthood. This close connection may now be taken over by friends, or more frequently the young person's partner. The attachment with parents is not so strong, as the young person becomes older, more independent, and forms different attachments.

An alternative view of young people and the mobile phone is also presented by Ribak (2009). She describes it as a transitional object for young people; transitional as it helps to facilitate independence into adulthood. Winnicott (1971) first used the transitional object concept in relation to children's use of a teddy bear or other toy. Use of the object creates a comforting environment in which children can negotiate separations with some security. The same could be said about the mobile phone for children too; it is comforting and helps to negotiate separations from parents. However, unlike an object the mobile has two-way communication; allowing children and parents to maintain that important connection between them.

For children, as for young people, the mobile phone can be a transitional object used to help negotiate separations. Further, as children become young people themselves the role of the mobile phone changes. It no longer operates as a *metaphorical leash* as suggested here, but as Ling (2004), and Ribak (2009) describe an umbilical cord; gradually lessening its connection to parents. There

is much more control associated with the leash metaphor compared to the umbilical cord metaphor, which is a distinction between the two metaphors.

Parents were happy to provide children with freedom as long as they could be reassured that they were safe and behaving appropriately. The mobile phone provided that important connection, allowing parents to be reassured. Children felt that it was really important too for their own safety. However, the leash had to work; children had to use it appropriately. Parents were concerned when the leash failed as the following example demonstrates. There were times when the leash did not quite work, which caused parental concern.

Mother: We did have one incident, which I found particularly scary. Greig was playing with a little boy in the village. They were just having fun. I called to find out where Greig was. He did not answer for a few moments. I had not seen him for two hours. Then he did not answer again and again. Then I thought he is probably at the park with a few people. I have quite good judgement. Then someone came on the phone and it was a really silly voice. Then I said, right that is enough. I came off the phone and rang it again. It rang for a few moments. I was scared at that point because I thought Greig's phone had been stolen and I did not know where Greig was. I was in pieces for a few moments. And then I found out, but his friend did not mean to. [...] His friend had just been doing a silly voice.

Greig: I was at the toilet.

Mother: Yeah, but his friend did not realise what affect that would have on a parent. As suddenly, my leash, as I referred to it, my leash had gone wrong. I did not know where Greig was. I did not know if Greig had got his phone. And I did not know who this boy was. I did not recognise the voice. So that ... they were apologetic. I explained why and it was just the safety thing. So we have had that safety incident. So for me it's all about the leash thing and losing it. With trial and error, we have had an error, and an error learnt. It is this [...] I don't think they realised what affect it had on me. It's scary when you think about it. I need it for Greig but I need it as well [Int: 2, 11 years].

The mobile phone as a *metaphorical leash* if used inappropriately, as in this example, could cause considerable concern; parents might fear that something harmful has happened to their child. As the parent was not able to connect to her child she felt concerned. Palen and Hughes (2007), in relation to young people and mobile phones, found that parents liked to be in control of their concern; the type of concern that arises from parental responsibility, which the mobile phone can help ease. This appears similar for parents and children, but more so because children are younger and usually less responsible compared to young people.

If the leash is used inappropriately, as in this example, children might fail to understand the significance it could have on their parents. Naturally, parents would worry. Parents needed to be able to trust their children. As Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015) found, parents do not feel that they can always trust their children, as in this example. In contrast, Ribak (2009) found that the young people she interviewed did anticipate parents' concerns, could be trusted, and liaised with parents when needed.

But sometimes it was not only children who used the leash inappropriately; parents got it wrong too. In this interview one father, who was also a teacher, comments about the way mobile phones were sometimes used in school by parents.

Father: Phones ought to be banned from school because they don't really need it. They have got the office, if people need to get in touch, they can get in touch that way. We get parents ringing them up [children] in the middle of lessons. Why, why is it that important? [...] They can't separate, bizarre [Int: 3, 11 years].

He suggests that some parents actually find it difficult to separate from their children. They needed not only the close connection discussed, but constant contact too. The purpose of the mobile phone is to provide children with freedom and independence away from the family, but here the mobile simply becomes another way for parents to control children when they are not with

them. This concept will be explored more fully within chapter 7. Once a child is provided with a mobile phone, a balance needs to be maintained with its use, so that children can have some freedom and parents are able to monitor that freedom, but not excessively. Children need to be able to gain confidence away from the family, without constant contact from parents. Parents must take care not to over-monitor their children or the very notion of freedom may simply evaporate. So it would seem that the mobile phone as a *metaphorical leash* has to be used appropriately by both children and their parents. Children need to recognise their role in responding to parents' calls appropriately. Parents need to take care and not over-monitor their children.

In other European countries where there is evidence that mobile phone use by middle years children started in advance of children here in the UK, researchers found that the connection between parents and children was important too. Parents and children very much needed the connection to keep in contact with when apart (Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004; Ling, 2007). In Norway Ling (2007) found the connection was primarily for reasons of child safety. In Finland however, Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) found the connection was a necessary part of family co-ordination, when mothers were working away from home. It was essential for co-ordination between children and their mothers. By contrast within this thesis, the connection seems to be primarily about children developing freedom. A concept which may absorb both Ling's notion (2007) of safety, as discussed here with children's outdoor play, and Oksman's and Turtiainen's (2004) notion of family co-ordination, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

6.2.2.2 Social interactions

Some children interviewed were experiencing freedoms in terms of their outdoor play, with the mobile having a supportive role; maintaining the close connection with home. However, most children, with some minor exceptions such as younger children, were experiencing freedom in terms of their interactions with

friends via their devices. Similar to outdoor play their social interactions with friends would be monitored by parents.

Children had fun communicating and socializing via their different devices. The previous chapter highlights many of their preferences for communication, which included texting and communicating via internet games. Internet sites which parents felt were safe and child-friendly could be accessed, as one girl highlights.

Naomi: I used to go on Moshi Monsters. Dad said I could not have any friends unless I knew them [on Moshi Monsters]. So I would only have my school friends [Int: 11, 9 years].

Here both father and daughter are taking no risks; only existing friendships can be accessed via the internet.

Parents tended to distantly monitor what children were saying to one another, as demonstrated in one focus group. *R: When my mum checks my hotmail, she used to always check it from her work when she had time [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].* Parents thus did not monitor all the time. They were monitoring just enough to make sure their children stayed safe online and that communications were appropriate. Appropriate communications were important to both children and parents, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. Researchers (Davie et al., 2004; O'Moore 2012; Ofcom, 2012a, 2012b) have highlighted the need for parental monitoring, particularly where children might be at risk of receiving inappropriate messages. It appears that the *metaphorical leash*, operated by parents, was applied to children's social interactions, as well as their outdoor play. Children did not seem to find it intrusive; they accepted it as part of their experience of using mobile / internet devices.

Some children, through their social interactions on internet sites, were forming friendship groups. In an interview Lilly-Mae explains how she developed her friendship group on Moshi Monsters.

Lilly-Mae: You click on the mouse and there is a friends' tree. If you want to add a new friend you type in their name. I wanted to be friends with my friend at school [...] I typed in her last name which is ... I then clicked on add. So then she was my friend. So then you get a number of friends on your friends' tree [Int: 7, 9 years].

Mostly, these friendship groups mirrored school friendship groups, for now at least. But this might change later as children became older and broadened their friendship circle. Discussions from young people's focus groups did not provide evidence to support this idea however, as their friendships were mainly associated with school friends and university friends too. But when looking at studies on young people and their social networking behaviours, it was clear that they were in contact with many different people and groups that they called friends (Zhou, Sornette, Hill & Dunbar, 2005; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Sutcliffe et al., 2012). These might be people that they had never met or only corresponded with briefly. Young people enjoyed these interactions as it enabled them to have friends; hundreds of them.

For children, as discussed, friendships were restricted. Internet sites were more controlled; age-appropriate and naturally monitored by parents. In this example Lilly-Mae's mother carefully checked Moshi Monsters before she was prepared to let her daughter use it, by making a monster herself. Lilly-Mae's mother describes her ideas on this site.

I: It sounds as if it is especially designed for ...

Mother: For children yes. It is almost like Facebook for children really; I think [Int: 7, 9 years].

Children's interactions on these sites were not considered to be social networking; not as yet anyway. However, parents did feel that they were laying the foundations for social networking in the future, as the quote suggests. Social networking allows individuals to socialize with friends and strangers online (Obee, 2012). Literature has shown that there can be risks associated with social networking (Haddon, 2007; Girls' Schools Association, 2011; Tobias, 2012), and

thus many parents do not want their children to be involved with these sites, as demonstrated here and within the literature (Ofcom, 2012b).

On closer examination of children's friendship groups, they tended to be of a practical as well as social nature. For example, children would use them to ask for help with homework, as one group of girls discuss.

R1: We get a lot of homework. So sometimes it involves the internet to help with our homework. [...]

R2: Sometimes when you have been given homework, you have not written down exactly what page you should be doing. So you can always text someone or ring someone, and then they can text you back [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

In comparison, young people's friendship groups seemed to have more of a psychological role, as one mother discusses in relation to her teenage daughters. *Mother: The friendships are so important at that age. They don't want to feel left out, or thinking that they are wearing the wrong thing* [Parent fgp 2]. For young people their friendship groups could be supportive; helping to ensure that their appearance fits in with their social group, reflecting the importance of shared identity. Studies by Fortunati et al. (2003), and Fortunati (2005) describe what young people wear as an essential part of their culture, influencing their identity. However, most of the children interviewed here about their friendship groups, were not at this stage of development; clothes and identity were not a priority. Online friendship groups seem to reflect what is important to children / young people depending on what is relevant at their particular stage of development. As described here, homework was important to children, but identity through fashion was particularly important to young people. Children were at a different stage of development compared to young people, thus their use of the internet for friendship was different to young people.

Overall, for middle years children *metaphorical leash* is sometimes evident in the way parents monitor their social interactions on their mobile / internet devices. Unlike children's outdoor play behaviours, which parents monitor all the time,

parents do not monitor their social interactions in the same way. They monitor them, but do so periodically. The *metaphorical leash* is not so obvious within children's social interactions as it is within their outdoor play behaviours. Perhaps parents felt that as children's social interactions via mobile / internet devices tended to be associated with existing friendships, they had fewer concerns than they did about their outdoor play behaviours. At least with children's social interactions it was easy for parents to check what was happening, as they often occurred at home. With outdoor play it was more difficult. Parents might not know where to find their child or what they might be doing, as demonstrated earlier with Grieg. Closer monitoring would therefore be considered necessary with outdoor play, compared to social interaction.

Metaphorical leash, this phase of freedom, as observed through children's outdoor play behaviours and social interactions, was about allowing children to have a taste of freedom. However, parental monitoring was in place, checking what children were doing. There was evidence of Baumrind's (1966, 1973) parenting styles – the authoritative approach, particularly within this phase. The authoritative parent provides guidance but does so with warmth, and through negotiation. For example, Lilly-Mae's mother described how she helped her daughter access Moshi Monsters, so her daughter could speak with school friends. This mother was being supportive of her daughter's need to be socially involved on the internet, by finding out more herself. By making a Moshi Monster she could understand exactly what kind of social interactions her daughter would be experiencing. She was then in an informed position about whether to allow her daughter to go ahead or not with this internet site. She was monitoring but at the same time being supportive of her daughter's need to interact socially with others via the internet. They could negotiate together how this would progress.

Dishion and Mahon (1998) and Valkenburg et al. (1999) have talked about the importance of shared activities within parental monitoring; parents and children doing things together so that they develop a close relationship and

understanding. The above is an example of this. With this approach parents are able to gain a better understanding of children's need to socially interact via internet sites and children might develop a clearer understanding about the importance of parental monitoring within their lives.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on social development describes the family as having a significant role in children's development, particularly with the provision of different opportunities within their lives. Access to mobile / internet devices was providing children with different opportunities to play out and socialize with friends. Such opportunities might not have existed without the provision of these devices. For example the mobile phone, particularly in relation to children playing out, was acting as a *metaphorical leash*, monitoring behaviour. Without the mobile phone parents would not be able to remain connected to their children, which as discussed, was essential for both children and parents for reasons of safety (Ling, 2007), family co-ordination (Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004), and as the thesis discusses, children's developing freedom. Interactions were occurring within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 1, allowing freedom to grow but in a controlled and negotiated way, through monitoring with the *metaphorical leash*.

Section 6.3 discusses *behavioural control*, which is the phase of freedom immediately before *metaphorical leash*. This phase shows that during the early stages of middle childhood parental controls are much tighter than described here.

6.3 Behavioural control

Behavioural control describes a phase of freedom with tight controls firmly in place governing children's behaviour. Some freedoms are given but in a fairly restricted way. The influence of parents at this stage of children's lives is fairly significant, as might be expected during middle childhood (Erikson, 1963;

Bornstein, 2012), particularly as this phase of freedom was usually associated with the early part of middle childhood (7 – 9 years), but not always. Strong attachments between child and parent are evident. Many of the quotes here are attributed to parents.

6.3.1 Parents influence children's use of their devices

Parents were a key influence on children's use of mobile / internet devices. For example the type of devices children would have. In one interview Will and his father describe Will buying his first iPod with internet access, several years earlier.

Father: We looked at them in a second hand shop and we saw them on offer.

Will: We had been thinking about them for a while.

Father: So I just bought you it, I think?

Will: Yeah [Int: 3, 11 years].

Will's father was obviously a major influence here, certainly at that time. But young people within their focus groups highlighted different influences. They discussed how friends had been the ones to guide them when they first acquired devices during their teenage years. In the following quote from a young adults' focus group, Mike talks about getting his first mobile phone.

Mike: I was 18. I had been putting off getting one. They came out and suddenly everyone had phones. Yeah, I was desperate not to have one, cause, they scared me a little, and I eventually was encouraged by my friends to go and get one [Ypfgp 3, 23 - 30 years].

As young people were older than children when they first acquired their mobile / internet devices, friends would naturally be a major influence on their decisions about purchasing. As Erikson (1968) has discussed, the influence of peers is very powerful during the teenage years. Young people very much want to be seen as similar to their friends and to conform to what is seen as the norm within their

friendship group. Conversely, as highlighted, children are likely to be influenced by their parents, due to the role parents have within their lives during middle childhood (Erikson, 1963; Bornstein, 2012). Although this is not to say that friends cannot be influential too. For some children, particularly the older ones (11 - 12 years) interviewed, friends were starting to have some influence on their decisions about devices, as the previous chapter highlights.

These devices have the ability to open children's minds to a wide range of different communication experiences, particularly for this generation of middle years children. More so than for any previous generation of middle years children. Yet some parents were not too keen for this to happen, as the following describes.

6.3.2 Tight controls and parental concerns

There were tight controls in place, certainly in the beginning, when children first started using their devices, as children and their parents discussed. *Mother: I really limit the internet* [Int: 5, 10 years]. Children were aware of the rules associated with internet use and accepted them. *Billy: At home we are allowed to go on some games for about half an hour once a week, which is fun* [Int: 5, 10 years]. Children were simply happy to have and be using their new devices. For example, Will talked about his early days with the iPod.

Will: I was really excited. I wanted to get one. I had heard about them and and I had a little go on one, and I liked it so, so I was excited [Int: 3, 11 years].

When children were young or first starting to use a new device, high levels of control were in place. Parents wanted to be sure children were using their devices safely and appropriately. Parents were concerned that there was a potential for things to go wrong. For example, risks of overuse were frequently discussed by parents within their focus groups. Some parents had even seen their children's behaviour change as a result of overusing their devices. One

mother talks about her son's use of the internet when playing a racing car game. *Mother: You see Ed has to be taken off because he gets completely red in the face [Parent fgp 3].* This mother was worried about Ed's behaviour, as he would become angry if asked to stop playing. He was just 7 years old.

Parents were concerned that children would become so engrossed in their devices that they would not want to do anything else. For example another mother, from the same focus group, felt that her children did not need to socialize beyond the boundaries of their own home.

Mother: They are living a life where they are socialising without going out. They have a social life without stepping out of the door [Parent fgp 3].

Mobile / internet devices were providing her children with friendships, which they absorbed themselves in when at home. She was becoming concerned.

Some parents were aware, from experiences with their children, that overuse could create problems. They were perhaps simply trying to guard against it becoming a serious problem, by putting tight controls in place. It was the younger children who experienced the tightest controls. However, this was not true for all children interviewed. There did seem to be some older children who had extensive knowledge and skills about devices, but who also experienced tight controls. In an interview with Zac, 11 years old, his mother talks about his use of the internet.

Mother: [...] Sometimes I will leave him. Sometimes he will ask me if he can go onto a particular ... like a play site and I will say yes. But when I come back he is not on that play site but on a different play site. It is much of a muchness, but we have words don't we; about going from one site to another without checking with me first [Int: 4, 11 years]?

The reason given for such tight controls was associated with younger children in the family.

Mother: I have to remember that we have got a 7 year old in the house. ... I don't want it to be Zac's responsibility that he has to restrict access for a 7 year old. ... I don't think that he should have to police it [Int: 4, 11 years].

But this reason seemed a little misleading, as other families with younger children did not impose such tight controls. Zac was quite skilled and aware of the importance of safety. It was perhaps associated with his mother's own fears about using the internet, as the following illustrates.

Mother: Playing catch up all the time. I am not confident that I am ... I am going to have to go and find out before he goes and gets a phone, so that I can block everything that I want to block. But for how long is that going to be feasible? I am not that confident at all [Int: 4, 11 years].

She was not confident herself about these devices, which was thus reflected within her parenting. Yet, Zac's skills could have helped her, as well as his siblings. Tripp (2010) found that where parents had a poor understanding of devices, as here, young people experienced restricted use, similar to Zac.

Potentially, children in Zac's position would find some of these controls restrictive. They might feel they are unnecessary or getting in their way creatively. As demonstrated in chapter 5, being creative was important to children. Existing research supports this view; tight restrictive controls can limit children's creativity on devices (Valkenburg et al., 1999; Livingstone et al., 2012). Initially on the surface, children like Zac did not report behavioural controls as a problem. But this might not be the full picture, as discussion later reveal.

Tight behavioural controls in place, for whatever reason, meant that parents would mediate their children's use of devices closely. Clear instructions about what children could and could not do, as highlighted in the previous example, were evident. Also, the amount of time children could spend on their devices – *Mother: ... They have a controlled amount of time on the Wii anyway [Int: 4, 11 years]*. Another mother suggested that devices could be used as bargaining strategies.

Mother: The more you use these tools [devices], the more that parents will use them as bargaining strategies. If you don't tidy your room I will take it away [Parent fgp 1].

Generally, mediation strategies discussed by parents were similar to those described in the literature review; similar to Ofcom (2012b), and Livingstone et al. (2012). They also seemed to mirror Valkenburg et al.'s (1999) parent styles of television mediation; restrictive and instructive, but not always socially viewing and working together, which children might find more helpful. Valkenburg et al. (2013) maintain parents and children working together gets more positive results.

There were different reasons why parents imposed tight behavioural controls with their children's use of devices. Most reasons seemed to be appropriate; so that parents could protect their children. However, there were occasions when parents seemed unnecessarily restrictive. This seemed to be more about parents' own concerns about devices, rather than their children's actual use of them. It was understandable that some parents imposed behavioural controls, certainly in the early days of use. But for other children the continuation of behavioural controls did not always seem appropriate. The relationship between these children and their parents seemed quite controlling. Parenting style reflected traces of Baumrind's (1966, 1973) authoritarian style. Parents reacting in a very controlling way to their children's lives; not only in relation to their children's use of devices but other aspects too. In families where this was the situation, children simply worked with it. On reflection however, this might have been because of the interview context. These children were usually interviewed with their parents. If it had been possible to interview these children alone, different views might have been disclosed by children about their situation; expressing frustration perhaps. More recent evidence suggests that restrictive strategies such as these are not always helpful (Haddon, 2013; Mascheroni, 2014).

There seemed to be little mention of more creative ways that parents could help their children. There were different mediation strategies that parents might have used but failed to mention, for example role modelling (Bandura, 1977). Parents

themselves were active users of devices. Observing their parents using mobile / internet devices each day, children would naturally be interested. Bandura (1977) maintains that children like to replicate the behaviours of those around them. For example, parents did not seem to realise how their communication behaviours could influence their children. There seemed to be a disconnection between parents' own use of these devices and what they expected from their children. Chapter 5 (section 5.2) shows how one child had learnt, by observing a parent perhaps, how not to communicate on devices, which demonstrates this disconnection. Socially viewing and working together (Valkenburg et al., 1999, 2013) did not seem to be a reality for some parents and children.

6.3.3 Playing out and social interactions tightly controlled

6.3.3.1 Playing out

Some children had fun playing out with their friends, as discussed, but naturally there were restrictions, as parents and children would be apart. Parents were happier if apart than that they should remain connected. The mobile phone helped to provide that connection. At the beginning of middle childhood there were few opportunities for children to go out into the street to play with their friends. Parents felt concerned about children separating from them, as this mother of a 7 year old describes.

Mother: I can't see why a 7 year old would be playing away. [...] It is bad parenting. I never let Freddie go. I will take you or we will go together to somebody's house [Int: 10, 7 years].

Parents wanted to make sure their children were safe. Behavioural controls were thus put in place. As children became older however, they were more likely to separate. When parents first begin to introduce freedoms they feel happier if they are not too far away themselves. One mother discusses about doing so

several years earlier, when her son was nine years old. *Mother: They went to the cinema on their own. We were in town as well. We dropped them off* [Int: 3, 11 years]. Parents were gradually introducing freedoms, monitoring; on hand should any problems occur. This seemed to be part of a process of preparing for freedom. With behavioural controls in place separations could occur, gradually moving towards the next phase *metaphorical leash*. Importantly maintaining that close connection.

The opportunity for freedom, with gradual introductions closely monitored, was not an unusual way for children to first experience freedom. It seemed quite natural. However, not all children experienced such a smooth transition. There were others, similar to earlier discussions about internet play sites (section 6.3.2), where some parents were showing signs of being too restrictive. This time it was evident in relation to children's outdoor play behaviours. Despite their children being able to maintain that close connection via the mobile phone, this was not enough, as parents in the following quotes highlight. Some parents were not letting their children have as much freedom as they had experienced when young. *Mother: We had much more freedom than they have* [Parent fgp 2]. Parents had a number of concerns about letting their children experience freedom. Life was different now compared to when they were young.

Mother 1: We were so streetwise. But mine I won't let them out. So they are not learning the skills to cross the road, because I am not letting them out.

Parents perceived that roads were dangerous because there was more traffic. Also, they felt that people could not be trusted in the same way as when they were young.

Mother 2: Paedophiles.

Mother 1: It is in your face all the time with the media. You don't have a day where you don't think [Parent fgp 2].

Due to these different concerns, which parents perceived to be associated with today's society, they felt there were risks in allowing their children to have the same freedom to play out as they had experienced. Brooks (2006) states how societal changes, such as these, impact upon children's freedoms, with fewer opportunities for freedom to develop. Boyd (2014) has also talked of parents' nostalgic memories of their own childhoods getting in the way of young people's freedom. Due to fears about today's society parents were limiting their children's opportunities for freedom, in an effort to keep them safe and protected. Some parents interviewed were even beginning to realize the impact of their concerns on their children's behaviour. Listening to parents' descriptions of their children's behaviour, the impact of their controls was definitely limiting. Children's lives, in some situations, were being directed towards staying at home, rather than playing out. When children did play out they tended to have more supervised play sessions – play dates. They would go to friends' houses organized by their parents. When children eventually got the opportunity to play out, they demonstrated signs of apprehension and uncertainty.

Mother 1: He won't go down to the corner shop or post a letter. So he has seen enough of the world from his bubble to know, that I really don't want to go there.

Mother 2: How old is he?

Mum 1: 11 [Parent fgp 3].

Apprehensive about going out; children would thus adopt more indoor play behaviours. Staying in often meant activities associated with the internet.

Mother 1: And it was interesting to have this son who was going on a sophisticated game; killing zombies, killing, machine gunning. But won't walk down to the corner shop [Parent fgp 3].

Along with communications on their mobile phones,

Mother: Lucy has her friends round to play and they sit on the sofa sending each other texts. Be sociable - chat. ... When are you going to grow out of that [Parent fgp 3]?

Parents found their children's play behaviours hard to understand. Yet children seemed to feel comfortable with these forms of behaviour; texting and internet games were the norm to them, it was their play. Nonetheless, these forms of play were not true for all children interviewed. There were others who still enjoyed playing out and were not that interested in playing internet games. In one interview for example - *Mother: Freddie would much rather be outside doing dens and stuff* [Int: 10, 7 years]. Freddie was young and might change his ideas later. But there were older children too who enjoyed playing out.

Billy: ... There is a huge field of elephant grass. Have you heard of that?

I: Yes.

Billy: It is like bamboo. It grows much taller than this ceiling. We run through it and make massive dens with leaves with some friends of ours [Int: 5, 10 years].

Restrictive outdoor play behaviours were true for some middle years children but not all it seemed.

Children's play behaviours were being influenced by behavioural controls imposed by parents. Tight, restrictive controls meant less freedom, usually resulting in fewer opportunities for children to play out. Normally, children are blamed for their passive behaviours (AYPH, 2012), and spending too much time on their devices (Girls' Schools Association, 2011). However, perhaps these behaviours are more to do with the restrictions placed upon them by their parents, rather than children's own initial instincts to play. This cohort seemed to be simply picking up on their parents' concerns about playing out and adopting more passive play behaviours, such as internet games and texting. Boyd (2014) has considered the same perspective in relation to young people; calling the consequences *networking publically*. Where young people were not able to experience behavioural freedoms such as visiting friends, they would find it elsewhere; socializing on the internet. Children's literature has been discussing for some time that children often show a reluctance to play out. Green Alliance

and Demos (2004) interviewed 10 and 11 year olds who did not think that the street was a safe place to play. Danger was often the first thing children mentioned when they discussed playing outdoors. Pooley (2011) found similar concerns when he interviewed children about playing out. He compared children's attitudes towards outdoor play today with children in the 1940s, living in the same area. Today's children showed more reluctance to play out.

Evidence from some parent focus groups showed quite a marked reluctance to let children go out to play. Some children were obviously at an age too young to do so, but others were not. Where parents' behavioural controls seemed prolonged, children demonstrated apprehensions when they did go out. Behavioural control as a stage could sometimes be too restrictive during middle childhood.

6.3.3.2 Social interactions

As a result of going out less, more indoor play behaviours were evident amongst this cohort. Some of these behaviours are discussed, as children socialize with friends via their mobile / internet devices.

Children engaged in different activities on the internet, often games. They were sometimes allowed to link up with friends. They could have direct contact with their friends, without them even being in the same room. Classmates would play games together, but quite differently from their parents' generation. Each child would be in their own home communicating via the internet, not together in the same physical space. Children had fun linking up in this way. Some children however were denied this opportunity, because of tight behavioural controls. As discussed in section 6.3.2, where Zac's mother discusses the restrictions imposed upon his internet use, he was not given the opportunity to participate in internet games with his classmates. Zac tended to play on his own, which he did not always feel happy about. In his interview Zac discusses how he feels about his classmates talking at school about linking up on the game Club Penguin. Zac:

Sometimes I feel a bit jealous. Sometimes, not all the time; they don't speak about it all the time [Int: 4, 11 years]. Here this evidence provides a sense of how one boy feels when he finds himself unable to join his friends on Club Penguin; he feels left out. Zac is not able to do the same as his friends because of tight behavioural controls imposed upon him at 11 years old, which is different from his friends.

For some children tight controls were governing their use of these devices, thus limiting the way they could communicate with others, as evident in this example. Other children however were learning how to work within these controls and even operating them for themselves, as Leah demonstrates in this next example. Leah has learnt to block children she does not want to speak to.

Leah: I have got Kik and it is free. It is like this texting sign but you only let who you want on it. So you can like block people if you don't want them. So you don't have to have anyone on it that you don't want [Int: 8, 10 years].

Here, Leah has controls in place; she understands why they are there and how to operate them. Similar to other research findings (Ofcom, 2012a), and as illustrated within chapter 5, interacting with their friends on their devices is important to children. As Livingstone (2008), and Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015) highlight, these devices give children the opportunity to be with their friends even when they are apart. Perhaps this is to children's advantage, when considering as discussed, that some children are not able to play out together as they might wish, due to tight behavioural controls. Socially linking up would thus be important to them, but unfortunately not available to all children.

This phase of freedom, *behavioural control*, is characterized by tight restrictive behavioural controls. But there is a need to allow children a bigger say in setting their own controls, which might help them to understand about being safe on their devices, as Leah's example demonstrates; negotiating with parents, as Haddon (2013) and Mascheroni (2014) suggest. It is important to have behavioural controls in place, particularly when children are young, because of

risks, such as overuse and being safe. Discussing mediation together from the start could be useful; parents and children gaining insights into the other's perspective. Parents might then find that they do not always need the tight restrictive controls they perceive, as they come to understand their children's use.

Children's social interactions on their devices are really important, particularly where parents have concerns about them playing in the local community. It helps children to connect with their friends. For some children mobiles / internet devices are offering an alternative to playing out. Children's social worlds may be internet-based, rather than locally based, similar to some young people. The next subtheme, *freedom: early beginnings*, follows on from the previous subtheme *metaphorical leash* and demonstrates the greatest level of freedom that was evident during middle childhood for this cohort.

On reflection, I began by expecting to describe children's developing sense of freedom, with the main focus on children's views. However, discussions did not develop as expected because parents play such a defining role in the development of children's freedom. It was not possible to mainly focus on children's realities; parents' views underpinned much of what children were doing, certainly at this *behavioural control* phase of freedom. Parents' realities thus formed the basis of discussions. However, in the next subtheme, *freedom – early beginnings*, children's realities become more evident.

6.4 Freedom: Early beginnings

The final subtheme within the theme freedom captures the early beginnings of freedom. Here, freedom really starts to emerge for some children during middle childhood. Much more freedom would emerge later during the teenage years. However, now during the latter part of middle childhood, they were gradually beginning to experience a sense of what was to come in the future. Freedom

gradually progresses; by 12 years most children have a mobile phone and with it comes episodes of freedom. Having a mobile phone was a significant step, as evidenced here and by other researchers (Ling & Haddon, 2008; Carbonell, Oberst & Beranu, 2013; Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015). The mobile phone also enabled parents and children to keep closely connected when apart.

As in previous discussions (sections 6.2 and 6.3), freedom will be considered both in terms of children's outdoor play (playing out) and socializing with others (social interactions). Playing out was starting to evolve into going out, for some. Children were generally older now, playing out was not quite so crucial for some, but going out with friends was starting to be.

6.4.1 Playing out / going out and social interactions

A transition was slowly occurring. Children definitely wanted more freedom away from the family. The desire for freedom was more apparent with children at the latter end of middle childhood (10 - 12 years), as the following discussion explores.

6.4.1.1 Playing out / going out

The desire for freedom was especially apparent amongst the boys. This was evident previously when some of the older boys wanted mobile phones so they could be off playing with friends locally (section 6.2). However, girls were a little later; it seemed to be a slower process for them. Freedom was starting to become evident for them in their conversations about organising events. Girls were beginning to organise aspects of their social lives, as Nicky highlights.

Nicky: I like it when you go to do a sleepover, because you can check if you need to bring a sleeping bag or something [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years]. Here, Nicky is thinking carefully about what she needs to bring to her planned social event.

Although children, the older ones especially, enjoyed doing activities with their friends, they were still interested in doing activities with the family too. They might even contribute to the organisation of a family event over the internet, as Nicky again discusses.

Nicky: What we have been doing recently. My cousin and uncle are coming to stay at my house. We are having a party for my uncle. We are going to Leamington and we have to have a menu to say like what we will be eating at like what time [Children's fgp, 9 / 10 years].

Surrounding any social event there is a need to organise what individuals are going to do together. Ling and Yittri (2002) maintain that the need to plan activities is an essential part of socialization, with mobile / internet devices playing a crucial role. Children would sometimes use emails / texts to organise social events with friends and family. The use of emails / texts for organisation might become a greater part of their lives in future, as they start to take on more responsibility for organising social events for themselves.

In comparison, young people were very much involved in going out with their friends and organising social activities via emails / texts. In the following discussion a mother talks about the planning of lifts organised by her teenage daughters via email.

Mother: We just leave that to the girls; they just sort it out. They will say whose parent is picking them up. Natalie will say you're dropping us down, and so and so's parent is picking us up [Ypfgp 1, 14 - 16 years].

Young people were happy to organise their own social lives and thus take on more responsibility, which Ling (2004) also found. In comparison children's organisation behaviours were just starting to develop, facilitated by the mobile and internet.

Before children could start to organise their own freedoms, parents needed to feel that they could be trusted. In the subtheme *metaphorical leash* an example

was presented where one mother felt that she had difficulty trusting her son Greig, as he failed to follow her instructions (section 6.2). In comparison, parents who trusted their children knew that they would behave appropriately and follow their instructions. An example is presented here where parents felt they could trust their daughter. Tee, a 10 year old, talks about the extra freedom she has been given since having her mobile phone. She was organising getting herself to and from dance classes. *I: How have you felt, being able to have that extra freedom? Tee: Feel grown up [Int: 9, 10 years].* Children really appreciated being trusted with their freedom. Charlton et al. (2002) have also talked about how important children felt freedom was to them, supported by the mobile phone.

Other participating children too were keen to demonstrate that they could be trusted with their freedom. However, their mothers were not so keen. Different factors seemed to get in the way, as evidenced in the following focus group.

Mother: Andy keeps saying to me at the moment that I don't trust him. I say to him, Andy it is not that I don't trust you, it is other people. Because he wants to bike to school, but he has to go under the bridge by the bypass [Parent fgp 2].

Andy's mother was concerned about Andy travelling alone to school by bike. She did trust him to follow her instructions but it was other people and aspects of the journey that concerned her. For parents to really begin to trust children with their freedom there are many different factors that have to be considered; trusting their own child is simply one of them. Safety within the local community is an important priority too.

If children demonstrated that they could be trusted with their freedom, and the community was safe, it could be to their advantage. Continued and extended freedoms might be given. As earlier demonstrated in the previous subtheme (6.2), David had just been given his mobile phone, which enabled him to cycle in the village. If he coped well with his new found freedom, this would be further extended. He was starting to use the mobile phone as his parents expected; to

let them know where he was. David was demonstrating that he could be trusted; therefore further episodes of freedom would follow.

Parents need to feel safe about their local community, but it is something that middle years children were also starting to consider. Safety in the local community was becoming noticeable in children's discussions about mobile / internet devices, certainly within this phase of freedom. In her interview, Janie explained that having the mobile with her when out walking the dog for example made her feel particularly safe. *Janie: Just that safety feeling, that you have got it with you, just in case* [Int: 1, 12 years]. Children were beginning to think about safety for themselves, rather than parents having to always think about it for them.

Children at this phase of freedom were beginning to sound similar to young people, as demonstrated within section 6.2. Young people described how they preferred not to leave home without their mobile and the feelings of safety that having it gave them. Children were showing signs of being at a similar phase of freedom to these young people. They were beginning to become more independent; making decisions themselves. Having the mobile with them helped. Children felt safer and could manage aspects of their own lives independently.

Parent mediation was not as controlling at this phase of freedom. It becomes parental guidance, rather than monitoring; parents feel that they can trust their children with some freedoms, and thus do not feel the need to monitor in the same way. Rather similar to young people as Ribak (2009) discusses; young people were given advice by parents and then made decisions about whether to take it or not. Some middle years children had achieved a phase of freedom that was similar in character to that experienced by young people.

This phase, *freedom: early beginnings*, with regard to playing out / going out is an opportunity which some middle years children are starting to experience.

Parent mediation is far less restrictive, with evidence of some children making decisions for themselves.

6.4.1.2 Social interactions

As well as some children experiencing more freedoms associated with playing out / going out, there were more freedoms associated with communication too. Children had fun communicating freely with others; talking to who they wanted and communicating in different ways via mobile / internet devices. Children interviewed were involved in many different activities. Mobile / internet devices were used as tools or resources to help them to organize their lives and communicate with others, as Janie illustrates.

Janie: Say, like I wanted to go shopping, I would ... Or to come to my house, or to go to their house. Like, when you are just bored, you text them, just to see what they are doing [Int: 1, 12 years].

Children liked being involvement in different activities. Yet they could still be enthusiastic users of their devices, without it being all encompassing. As Leah discussed in her interview; highlighting all the different activities that she did, but use of her devices does not dominate.

Leah: Well, I do ballet, tap and theatrecraft. I do drama and sometimes I do choir. Mmm I sometimes do horse riding, and I do swimming and ... street dance.

I: Fantastic. What is your favourite of all of those things that you do?

Leah: Horse riding. [...]

I: So where does ... using computers, and phones and things like that come in? Is it just something that you do or is it really important to you?

Leah: It is something that I do, it is not really important [Int: 8, 10 years].

Yet, some young adults interviewed demonstrated evidence of becoming highly involved in their devices, at one time or other. They discussed in their focus group how their behaviour had changed since that time.

R1: Think I was probably 18 or 19 when I first started using Facebook.

R2: I started using it at a similar age and continued until I was 24. I don't really use it that much now. I use it to spy on people – see what other people are doing. But I don't really do very much. No where near as much as I was originally doing [Ypfgp 3, 23 - 30 years].

As young people they had been very keen on socializing via their devices, now they were less interested. They had been through a phase where using their devices had been really important, perhaps all encompassing. However, they had grown away from this, becoming more balanced in their use. Studies show that some young people are very involved in their devices and can use them for up to 15 hours per day (Ofcom, 2014), which sounds similar to the previous behaviour of the young adults in this research.

Children, at this phase of freedom were adopting a balanced approach. They were not similar to some young people / young adults, who had become engrossed in their devices; they were more balanced. Perhaps, having been introduced to their devices at a young age could have been to their advantage. Children's use had been undertaken in a more controlled way, compared to young people / young adults. Parents had carefully controlled and monitored their use, with less scope for things to go wrong. Conversely, young people / young adults had been introduced to these devices by their friends, with less restrictions. In addition for children, schools were undertaking training programs to help support them learn about mobile / internet devices, as the following interview demonstrates. Will and his dad talk about Will learning how to use devices safely through a schools' education program.

I: Where would you say you have learnt about the safety aspects?

Will: At school with DARE. ... Yeah, cause it is quite helpful for that and other things. They talk about drugs.

Father: Yeah, the DARE programme.

Will: D A R E. ...

Father: Part of Will's first year in PHSE will involve looking at cyberbullying [Int: 3, 11 years].

Will, not only had his dad's support in learning how to use his devices safely, but had also been given support from school, which would continue as he changed schools. Collin, Rahilly, Richardson and Third (2011) point out that children have been showing signs of being able to manage their internet devices safely. Collin et al. (2011) felt that learning through safety programs, as evidenced here, was certainly a contributing factor. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 2 was evident; family and school working together.

Overall, children's social interactions at this phase of freedom seems appropriate. They are not letting mobile / internet devices dominate their lives, as perhaps young people / young adults had done before them. Parents and schools are helping by working together. As Cowie (2013) describes, schools now equip children with the skills necessary to understand the complexities associated with mobile / internet devices. With this in mind there may be advantages for children being introduced to these devices at a younger age than previous generations. If introduced carefully with parents to help provide guidance and support, along with school, children may adopt a healthy approach to their use. Others researchers have remarked on children's enthusiastic use of mobile / internet devices (Healy & Anderson, 2007; Livingstone & Brake, 2010). Some have remarked on concerns about the potential for children to adopt inappropriate behaviours (Carbonell et al., 2013). Yet within the research here children were finding a balanced way to use devices. Their devices were important to them for interacting with others, yet they could use them appropriately and safely. This special cohort showing that the opportunities they had been given with mobile /

internet devices had supported their development, as long as parents were not too restrictive.

Livingstone et al. (2012) highlighted a greater need for collaboration between home and school as support for children and their devices, which here seems to have been demonstrated, with beneficial effects for children's development. There is evidence at this phase of freedom, *freedom: early beginnings*, that children are able to use their devices safely. For middle years children to have reached this phase of freedom, they have been supported, and are applying the guidance they have been given by parents and school, as the cohort demonstrates. They were happy to socialize safely on their devices.

On reflection however, it is worth adding a cautionary note. It has to be remembered that this is the impression children were giving. It was their realities they were describing; how they perceived things at the time they were interviewed. Their use of devices may not be so balanced and appropriate at all times, as discussions revealed in the previous chapter (section 5.4). Children might not feel inclined to mention it to a researcher; someone they did not know that well. To gain this sort of detail from children, it would require becoming closer to children; perhaps undertaking a series of interviews.

Overall, *freedom: early beginnings*, showed similarities to that of young people's behaviour. Children were going out and socializing, which particularly involved use of mobile / internet devices. Most seemed to be coping well and using their devices in a balanced and appropriate way. Parental guidance was the general way for parents to mediate at this phase, with children making decisions themselves whether to take that guidance or not. Parenting was more positive with fewer controls and more negotiation. Parenting was similar to Baumrind's (1966, 1973) authoritative approach, providing support and guidance as needed. Yet differently from some young people, children were not overly involved in their devices.

As predicted, children's voices were much more evident during this phase of freedom. Children's realities were more apparent, with less inclusion of evidence from parents about children's realities, as the other phases demonstrated. Children, experiencing this phase of freedom, were generally at the latter end of middle childhood, thus their voices were heard. Within the literature review emphasis was placed on finding out from middle years children themselves about their use of mobile / internet devices. From exploring the literature independence and freedom featured as important issues to children about mobile phones (Charlton et al, 2002). From the evidence explored here with children, freedom and independence are still important; socially and behaviourally, with the mobile phone allowing them to explore this. But this is not the situation for all children. Some were finding their behaviours and interactions restricted, often because parents had concerns. These findings are similar to evidence from young people, where parents would restrict young people's use of devices due to their own concerns (see Boyd, 2014).

6.5 Conclusions

Chapter 6 has presented theme 2 *freedom*, highlighting how freedom emerged steadily during middle childhood for most children interviewed. Freedom was observed both within children's social interactions and behaviours. Mobile phones were particularly helpful, assisting children in the management of these freedoms. However, some children were experiencing restrictions, often associated with parents' concerns.

The theme *freedom* addresses the first research question - *What do mobile phones / internet devices mean to children (7 - 12 years) within their lives, as described by children themselves?* Children's views were discussed alongside parents' views, and also compared with young people's views and theory on these devices, to help understand children's developing freedoms. Both chapters 5 and 6 together respond to this first research question, illustrating the

meaning of devices for one group of children. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 1 and 2 are evident within *freedom*, showing how these different social settings can support children's developing freedom.

Three phases of freedom emerged – *freedom with a leash*, *behavioural control*, and *freedom: early beginnings*, each demonstrating differences in children's behaviour and social interactions. These phases illustrate how freedom gradually emerges during middle childhood. *Metaphorical leash* was the phase most commonly associated with middle childhood. Parents were keen to allow their children to develop some freedoms but controls had to be in place. *Behavioural control*, the initial phase of freedom, was restrictive in contrast. But perhaps this was appropriately so, bearing in mind how young children (7 – 9 years) typically were and the concerns parents had about children separating from them at this age. However, it was not an appropriate phase of freedom for some of the older children who were experiencing it; 11 year olds who were not able to socialize with their friends because of parents' restrictive controls. *Freedom: early beginnings* was the phase of freedom typically associated with the latter part of middle childhood and demonstrated similarities with young people's freedom. Children who experienced this phase had demonstrated to their parents that they could be trusted to go out and socialize safely in the local community, using their mobile phones to keep in contact with home as necessary. This phase of freedom reflected autonomy, along with negotiation between children and their parents.

Importantly, *metaphorical leash*, and *freedom: early beginnings*, needed to be adopted at the right time for each individual child. Some parents opted for these phases too soon. For example, as in Greig's situation where he ignored his mother's calls, and similarly in Vanessa's situation where she upset her friend on Facebook. Both children were not behaving maturely in relation to their phase of freedom; they were being insensitive towards others. Or parents adopted these phases too late, as in Zac's situation, where behavioural controls were maintained for too long, leading Zac to feel frustrated and isolated from his

friends. Overall, the mobile phone played a significant role within freedom, both as a tool or resource for parents to monitor their children's freedom, and for children to remain connected to their parents when apart.

The theme *freedom* is a concept also discussed in research by Ling and Helmersen (2000). Similarly, they talk about freedom developing as a series of stages or episodes for young people, with the mobile phone playing a key role. An important difference between their concept and the concept developed here is detail. Ling and Helmersen (2000) provide little detail associated with their episodes of freedom for young people, whereas details are provided here on children's phases of freedom. Comparisons with Ling's and Helmersen's (2000) theory will be discussed further within chapter 8.

It is important to think about the social processes underlying children's and parents' interactions around devices, identified in earlier chapters; the *special nature of this cohort as young users* of mobile phones, and *parents' concerns* about children using them. Freedom, for this cohort of children, appeared to depend upon parents' mediation strategies. Children tended to develop more freedom as parents changed their mediation strategies; using fewer restrictions and negotiating with children. Middle years children seemed to be treated differently from young people, as well as differently from each other in relation to freedom. Different factors were at play, for example age and development. Children were younger and less mature, so naturally children's behaviours would be more restricted compared to young people. As children approached their teens they were more likely to develop freedom on a par with that experienced by young people. But this was not the situation for all middle years children, some, despite being mature and fast approaching their teens, freedom for them was not developing in the same way as their friends. Parents' concerns appeared to be playing a significant role in the restriction of their freedom. This demonstrates how children of the same age could develop freedom differently.

Parents' concerns could be linked to *control*; providing their child with freedom might erode parental control. Maintaining control was important. Their child having a mobile phone at a young age, for example, threatened parental control. These parents seemed to fear children's use of devices. They did not have the knowledge themselves to manage their children's use. Their children knew more than they did, undermining parental control. In such situations this resulted in parents being strict, overly strict and controlling within their children's lives, as in Zac's situation; limiting his freedom. As discussed in the literature review similar evidence has been found with young people; parents' concerns dominating, resulting in parents becoming very controlling of young people's lives. Researchers found this was often as a consequence of parents having limited knowledge about devices (Tripp, 2010; Boyd, 2014).

Other parents had concerns too, but the motive in their situation did not seem to be about control. They were concerned with children's safety and freedom. They would provide their child with a mobile, to ensure their child was safe. But some of these parents still remained concerned so they would constantly contact their child via the mobile, instead of giving their child an opportunity to develop some independence. Their appeared to be different motives behind parents' controlling behaviours, which were influencing children's behaviours in different ways.

The consequences of parents' concerns and control, for whatever motive, might be worse for children compared to young people, because parents have such an influence during middle years compared to the teenage years. Health promotion strategies could be implemented by psychologists to help support parents; encouraging them to think carefully about how they can positively support children's development with their devices.

As a way of supporting parents further, psychologists could also learn more about children and their development by studying middle years children and their devices. The framework developed here would provide a useful basis, both

as background information and as an assessment tool. Psychologists would be able to assess how children are functioning developmentally, adapting elements of the framework. An example suggested in the previous chapter was the behaviour *cool*, identified as a potential measure. Other themes developed within this framework could also be incorporated into the tool. The theme *freedom* could be included as a measure. Such a measure would be able to guide psychologists about where children are with the development of their freedom, based upon what might be expected for their age and maturity, using the subthemes described here as a guide.

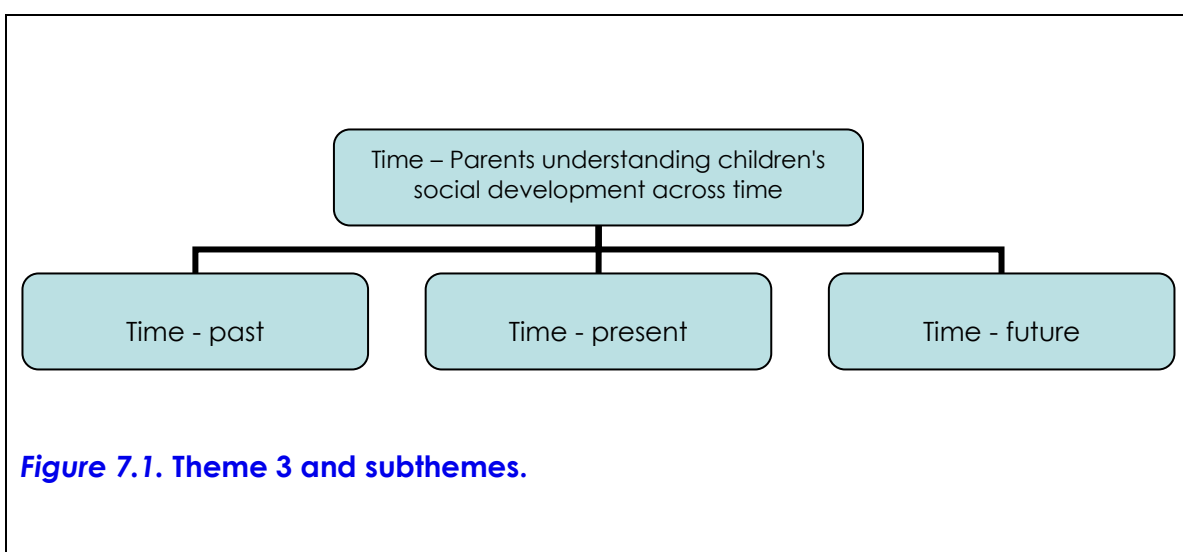
Incorporating other behaviours as measures would be useful too. For example children's skill on their devices, as identified by Hasebrink et al. (2011). His theory demonstrates the different characteristics associated with different levels of skill adopted by children as they progress with their devices. Introducing freedom and skill as measures within such a psychological assessment tool would be able to identify how children are progressing and where children might be experiencing difficulties with the development of both these behaviours.

Children can develop freedom through their devices, but some face restrictions imposed by parents. Interesting insights into the relationship between parents and children particularly surrounding freedom and how children's attachment to parents changes, have been revealed within this chapter. It highlights the development of freedom as having an important meaning to children with their devices. Chapter 7, the next chapter, looks at the final theme *Time*, responding to the second research question about parents' views on their role with children's devices.

Chapter 7: Theme 3 – Time - Parents understanding children's social development, across time

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 presents the third and final theme. The focus here is on the second research question - *What are parents' views about their role within children's use of mobile phones / internet devices?* The chapter is based on an analysis of parents' thoughts, but does include perspectives from other participants, gathered through the different focus groups and interviews. Within theme 3 the reality for parents in trying to understand their children's use of devices is presented. Children's social development emerges at the centre of their thoughts. The theme has three subthemes based around time – *past*, *present* and *future*, all focusing on how parents are thinking about their children using mobile / internet devices (Figure 7.1).



7.2 The theme

7.2.1 Time

Time is something that individuals perceive with their senses and determines the way they live each day. Individuals feel that they are living their lives through time. They live in the present, look back to the past and consider what the future may hold. Certainly where children are concerned the future seems especially important (Hammond, 2012), particularly for parents. Parenting is about preparing children for their future lives as adults (Bornstein, 2012). Cottle (1976) and Hart-Davis (2011) highlight *past*, *present* and *future* as the main constituents of time. Applying these constituents of time to parents' thoughts on children's (7 – 12 years) use of mobile / internet devices, helped me to unlock some of parents' realities about the meaning of these devices within the parenting role, for one group of parents. Each of the subthemes will be discussed in turn.

The theme time demonstrates parents' thoughts moving backwards and forwards in time. Thinking in terms of *past*, *present* and *future* seemed to help parents understand how mobile / internet devices could support their children's social development, and identify their parenting role within this process. But not all parents find it so easy.

7.2.2 Time - Past

It was evident that the past was influencing parents' thinking about children's mobile / internet devices. The past was most significant when participating parents discussed their own childhoods. Parents would often reflect back in time, making comparisons between childhoods then and now, in an effort to understand their children's social development.

7.2.2.1 Children's outdoor play

One aspect of childhood which parents would commonly talk about was playing in the streets with their friends as children, along with the freedom and independence this gave them. Here, during one interview, a father begins by talking about the advantages for his son in having a mobile phone. *Father: But the biggest thing for Will has been independence, more than anything else.* He goes on to clarify why having a mobile was necessary now, compared to when he was Will's age.

Father: Oh yeah, it is totally different. I could go anywhere. I just played out in the street. There was not so many people around, there was not so much traffic [Int: 3, 11 years].

This father compares the past with the present, through his description of society at different times. He had much more freedom as a child compared to Will's experiences. Will's freedom had been restricted, seemingly because of the busy nature of his local community. However, things might change now as Will had a mobile phone, and could contact home when out.

Having a mobile phone was a significant step for children, providing them with new opportunities for freedom, similar to young people's experiences (Ling & Haddon, 2008; Carbonell et al., 2013; Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015). This seems to be the situation for Will; with the opportunity to do more. Perhaps his freedom was now on a par with his father's experiences of freedom as a child. From this example differences in society over time are observed, and how they impact upon childhood behaviours particularly play.

Other parents had similar concerns to this father (section 6.3.3). By comparing the past with the present they concluded that society was not as safe today compared with the past, which meant they had to restrict their children's behaviour. For example, parents felt that negotiating the streets could be difficult for children today.

Parent 1: I used to walk to school, and I used to cross roads, but I rarely remember seeing a car going down them. We did not have to stand there and wait and judge.

Parent 2: They are all in a rush. It's all these busy busy people [Parent fgp 3].

The amount of traffic on roads has increased significantly since these parents were children (Sustrans, 2014), making some streets very busy and difficult for children to navigate. Other concerns for parents which might lead them to restrict their children's behaviour included the type of people their children might encounter.

Parent 1: To suspect people. Not to think that people are 11 year old girls from down the road [...]

Parent 2: I suppose you are then expecting them to manage themselves, to then be aware of paedophiles [Parent fgp 1].

Playing outdoors was thus restricted for children. At least until parents felt less concerned and knew their children would be responsible. Allowing children to have a mobile phone when playing outdoors helped parents to feel confident about their children's safety. Children could contact home if there was a problem.

Through a comparison of the past with the present parents demonstrate their different concerns about children and society today, giving reasons why they might restrict their children's outdoor play. They were trying to balance their children's need for freedom, with their own concerns about society. Similar perspectives have been found with parents and young people. Boyd (2014) found that parents would idealize their own childhoods compared to young people's childhoods, and as a consequence young people's freedom would be restricted. Past childhood experiences were also influencing parenting decisions in the present, as the next section explains.

7.2.2.2 Childhood memories and their influence on parents' decisions about outdoor play

Listening to parents' discussions about their childhood experiences they always seemed so positive. Was the past really so good or were parents simply remembering it that way? Hammond (2012) points out that memories of the past are not always as accurate as individuals' perceive, the following discusses. In one focus group parents reminisced about biking as children.

Parent 1: I remember I used to get on my bike and would be gone all day.

Parent 2: We would be out on the estate somewhere [Parent fgp 3].

They reflected on the freedom they had experienced as children. But were their memories of the past somewhat distorted perhaps? One mother (parent 2) goes on to talk about her daughter wanting to go out on her bike with a friend. Remembering how she had enjoyed the experience as a child, she lets her daughter go.

Parent 2: She said, we went off to this and went off to that, and to that [biking with a friend]. But there were so many dodgy people around. She said that there were all these dodgy gangs of boys. Some of them had been in prison. It was awful! And I thought how funny, because I thought that Lucy would be gone, gone, FREEDOM! It was fantastic. It unnerved her. So I said, you are alright then in your gated community, then, aren't you? Yes, she said, cosseted. Then another part of me said, thank God you are [Parent fgp 3].

Biking for Lucy was perhaps not the experience she had imagined it would be. It certainly did not live up to her mother's experiences of biking as a child. However, at least Lucy had been allowed to go and find out for herself. Mother and daughter had both tried, but found that the freedom Lucy so desired was not as expected. Lucy thus withdraws to the safety of her gated community,

which was probably very different from the estate she had recently visited on her bike.

There seems to be a sense of relief in the mother's description of what happened. She is pleased that Lucy's experience did not live up to what she had experienced as a child. Lucy might be reluctant to try again, at least for a while. Has the parent painted an unrealistic expectation of what biking should be like? This was Lucy's first experience. She perhaps did not make the best decisions about where to ride, as she lacked the experience and knowledge. Yet, if Lucy went again she might make different decisions, based upon what she had learnt about the community from her first visit. The next biking experience might then be a more positive one.

Could the same be true of parents' childhood experiences? Perhaps their early experiences of outdoor play were not so successful either, but they failed to remember. They were only able to remember their positive experiences, which might have been based upon learning over time. With additional opportunity and support from parents, children's future outdoor play experiences could be as good as their parents.

If parents only ever remember their positive childhood experiences, then this will compound an already difficult situation for children in their bid for freedom. Children's development of freedom will undoubtedly comprise of ups and downs; some experiences will be positive, whilst others less so, as they get to know their local community. But at least Lucy was learning to develop skills in managing her own freedom, with the assistance of the mobile phone. Parents, with their memories of the past, just needed to be a little more realistic with their children about what to expect, when they first begin to develop freedom.

For children developing freedom initially may mean finding out what actually exists within the local community; where is safe to go and who is okay to talk to. Preventing children from finding out for themselves, not taking some risks, could

in fact be holding children back from developing the confidence and skills they need to develop freedom. At least if children have a problem they can use their mobile phone to contact parents. When parents were young and were out with friends, this opportunity did not exist.

It may be of benefit for children and parents to work together preparing children for freedom. Instead of parents measuring each experience a child has against a similar experience of their own from the past. If parents talk about the type of experiences children are likely to encounter and how to manage these, this may be a more useful strategy, rather than using the past to determine the present. As Boyd (2014) points out with young people, parents can be too nostalgic, which gets in the way of young people developing freedom, just as the evidence shows here with children and parents' decisions about outdoor play.

Schools and parents could work together, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests in social settings 2. Schools and parents are starting to work together on children's mobile and internet safety (Department of Education, 2012a, 2012b), as discussed through projects such as DARE (section 6.4.1.2). But there is also a need for schools and parents to look at freedom and consider how children can learn to make decisions about their own freedom when out in the local community, supported by the mobile phone. This would help to provide some reality to children's mobile phone use in the local community, instead of parents making decisions based on past realities, which may no longer have relevance. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory maintains social settings can influence development through the support they provide, which schools and parents could do together. To do so could really help support children's psychological growth in terms of freedom.

Memories of the past are not always accurate. They can often become distorted or change over time. Hart-Davis (2011) maintains that individuals do not remember events exactly as they happen. Looking to the past, reflecting on childhood memories, was an important strategy for parents. It helped them to

understand why children wanted to do particular outdoor activities, thus giving them important insights into children's social development. However, it did not always help parents make the best decisions for their children about outdoor play.

In the next section however, parents' thoughts about the past take a different turn. Again looking at parents' memories of their own childhoods, some parents begin to think that their children's social interactions on mobiles / internet devices could be offering children something quite special. Certainly compared to their experiences as children.

7.2.2.3 Parents' memories of their social interactions as children

Parents' memories of the past were typically positive with the present viewed less favourably. However, a few parents viewed the past in negative terms, and could see how their children's social development could in fact be positively influenced by mobile / internet devices in the present.

Mother: They are in a world where they are in constant communication or can be, with friends. If you relate back to when we were their age, to keep in touch with friends, who say, then would go all over England during the summer holidays. We didn't even phone, so you didn't. It was much harder to keep in touch [Ypfgp 2, 19 - 21 years].

This parent felt that possibilities were opening up for children / young people, certainly in terms of communication and social interaction, in ways that had not been possible when she was young. Mobile / internet devices had not been available then. Children can so easily stay in contact with one another now, no matter what country they might be visiting; they can still remain connected, as the next example illustrates. One parent discusses how her son Johnny was in regular contact with friends abroad. *Parent: It's really interesting. People who have gone to Spain. Granger family have gone to Madrid now, so they have been Skyping globally [Parent fg 3].*

Parents' memories sometimes demonstrated the restrictions that were imposed upon their communications when young. One mother talks about how phone conversations were managed in her family.

*Mother: You could listen in, when I was growing up.
Your mum knew who was calling, listen to part of the
conversation, and knew how long you were on [the phone]
[Parent fgp 2].*

As children, parents encountered difficulties when communicating via the family phone. There was no mobile phone, only the landline which operated as the phone for all the family. Frequently these phones were situated in a communal place within the home, which made it difficult to have a private conversation. Gillard, Wale and Bow (2003) have similarly discussed communication problems associated with the family phone. Family members had the opportunity to listen, sometimes interrupting conversations.

Communication, parents felt, was a lot easier for children today compared to the past when they were young. Children having their own mobile phone meant they were able to keep their calls private, unlike the past. Parents felt that the mobile was providing their children with opportunities; the kind of opportunities that they themselves would have liked at a similar age, if it had been possible. Boyd (2014) highlights that privacy becomes increasingly important to young people as they become older, which the mobile can support. Children were being given this same opportunity for privacy. An opportunity that their parents had been denied when young. Literature too has commented on the communication opportunities these devices offer children / young people today (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009, Livingstone et al., 2012).

Overall, there were pros and cons in parents looking back to the past as an attempt to understand children's social development. On the one hand it might impede parents' understanding; potentially limiting children's development, particularly outdoor play. Yet, it could also be useful, as some parents were able to see opportunities for their children's social development, particularly in terms

of social interaction. Mobile / internet devices were offering their children different communication opportunities, which they were happy to encourage.

Within the subtheme *time - past* it was evident that by looking back in time parents were able to make comparisons with the present, which sometimes helped them to support their children's social development with their devices, but not always. More recently other researchers too have mentioned parents' nostalgic memories of the past as an influence on parenting and devices (see Boyd, 2014; Haddon & Vincent, 2015). This notion of the family group looking back in time can be linked to Bronfenbrenner (1979) social settings 5. He views *time* as a setting for development, which is observed here with past and present coming together through parents' reflections of the past influencing their decisions in the present. The following subtheme investigates further this notion of *time*; parents thinking about children's social development across time. It examines how parents view the present with the mobile phone featuring as an important tool or resource within parenting.

7.2.3 Time – Present: Resourcing the present

As well as the past, parents naturally had thoughts about their children's current use of mobile / internet devices, which have been mentioned in the other two themes. Similar to other research, the current research found that opportunities and concerns (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009, Livingstone et al., 2012, Livingstone & Helsper, 2013) featured within parents' discussions. Some parents understood that mobiles / internet devices offered their children opportunities, but they too had concerns. Beyond opportunities and concerns there was something else. Initially, I started to write about parents' thoughts on opportunities and concerns as they related to *time - present* within the thesis. But following a period of reflection (Schön, 1983, 2011), I began to question this. My writing was not really offering anything insightful beyond an existing understanding within psychology. As Schön (1983, 2011) suggests I needed to challenge my current thinking further;

to go beyond the obvious. Braun and Clarke (2013) maintain themes are not set in stone; they can change and evolve. Writing up, looking at what was initially written, did not represent the really interesting story about *time - present* for parents within the thesis. Thinking carefully, going beyond opportunities and concerns, there was a latent subtheme (Braun & Clarke, 2013), one which explained the reality for parents more clearly (section 4.2.2). This latent subtheme, rather similar to the way *freedom* had been able to explain children's behaviours, it was able to explain the meaning of the mobile phone for some parents within their parenting role. Thus a slightly different approach was written in relation to *time – present* than originally intended.

7.2.3.1 The mobile phone as a resource

Thinking about the different ways parents discussed using the mobile phone with their children, it played an important supportive role; it allowed parents to support their children. Parents were able to contact their children as needed and respond to them as necessary, thus providing support within different social settings (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979). On a day to day basis the mobile phone thus seemed to be an important resource for parenting. It enabled parents to keep track of their children's activities. For example, knowing where all their children were at a given time and exactly what they were doing.

Parent 1: So you are on the way to school. Let me know when you have got there.

Parent 2: So as soon as they go to senior school?

Parent 1: It's a condition I let them have one [mobile phone]. It's the safety issues [Parent fgp 3].

Parents were keen for their children to have a mobile phone, as it enabled children to communicate their whereabouts. Considering that some of these parents had concerns about the local community, the mobile would reassure them that their children were safe. It seemed what really appealed to parents about the mobile was safety. In fact, within one focus group parents maintained

that it was the very reason why most parents bought their children a mobile phone. *Parent: At the end of the day, that's how we have all talked ourselves into letting them have phones. Safety* [Parent fgp 3]. Perhaps it was no surprise then that the mobile phone, within *time - present*, was used a resource for parenting.

Other researchers too have discussed the mobile phone as an important way for parents and young people to remain connected when apart (Rakow & Navarro, 1993; Palen & Hughes, 2007; Boyd, 2014). Keeping children / young people safe is an essential part of parenting. Safety and protection are frequently seen as priorities for parenting (see Reder, Duncan & Lucey, 2003). Therefore, having such a resource as the mobile phone which enables parents and children to remain connected, would be valued by parents. Importantly too, for some families they had more than one child to consider. Parents, particularly mothers, needed to co-ordinate the whole family. They needed the resource (mobile phone) so they knew what was happening with the family at different points during the day.

Mother: For me the safety. Being able to communicate with all the members of my family whenever I need to, and knowing where they all are, is an important thing for me, definitely. Natalie is at an age now where she could be anywhere. She is out all day. I don't see her from breakfast to ...
[Ypfgp 1, 3 children 10 to 16 years].

Further, some mothers were working long hours outside the home, located some distance from their children. Family co-ordination was especially important, particularly if they were spending large parts of the day away from their children. Busy mothers, employed with several children to care for, found that if all their children had a mobile phone, it was invaluable. It enabled them to co-ordinate the family, as well as reassuring themselves that all their family were safe.

Countries where children have been using mobile phones for several years, before children here in the UK, have also looked at how families co-ordinate

themselves. As previously mentioned Oksman and Turtiainen (2004) in Finland found that family co-ordination was an important reason why children had a mobile phone. Working mothers needed to check where their children were and organise different aspects of family life from a distance. Similar evidence was found in Switzerland within Geser's (2006) study on young people.

Within the research here for some parents it seems the mobile phone was an essential resource for family co-ordination. Importantly, supporting busy working mothers co-ordinate their whole family, and helping them remain connected. Parents needed this connection to be maintained, if they were going to allow their children freedom, as the subtheme *metaphorical leash* demonstrated (section 6.2). The resource could support children's freedom, facilitate family co-ordination and reassure parents that their children were safe. As mentioned previously (section 6.2.2.1) children's freedom, as identified within the thesis, included Oksman's and Turtiainen's (2004) notions of family co-ordination, along with Ling's (2007) ideas about safety. The mobile phone as a resource for parenting was able to provide all this for parents.

Previous discussions within the thesis about parenting and children's devices have tended to discuss mediation strategies (chapter 6), similar to literature sources (Livingstone et al., 2009 - 2011, Livingstone et al., 2012; Ofcom, 2012a, 2012b). Further, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, concerns and opportunities are frequently discussed (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009, 2012, Livingstone & Helsper, 2013). However, UK literature has not previously envisaged the mobile phone as a resource for parenting, not at a conceptual level (to my knowledge). The mobile phone as a resource for parents allows busy mothers to support their children across different social boundaries.

Within this conceptual analysis of the mobile as a resource for parents within *time – present*, there also appears to be some evidence of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 3; where he describes social settings that the child is not in, but have the ability to affect development. This can be demonstrated in relation to

mothers spending time away from their child, particularly where they might be working away from home for an extended period, and need the resource to maintain contact. Social settings 3 can provide opportunities for child development in way that would not have been possible if social settings 3 had not existed. The child might need to develop greater independence and engage in different social interactions, as a consequence of not being with the mother. Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained that his different social settings, including settings 3, could provide different social opportunities for children's development.

7.2.3.2 Resource or risk?

As a resource the mobile could be essential for parenting; helping some parents support their children, and reassure themselves that their children were safe. However, as evidenced within this thesis, some parents could be overly supportive. Sometimes, because of their concerns parents could be too involved in mediating their children's behaviour. The following reveals in more depth some of the potential risks associated with the mobile as a parenting resource.

As a resource it could help parents guide and support their children as needed, within *time - present*.

Mother: Some girls who were in her dance group... if anyone said anything that was not nice; I made her shut it off. Evie had to block them. You have to monitor what they do [Parent fgp 2].

Here, the mother has provided specific information to help Evie (12 years) deal with a difficult situation. It could be viewed as helpful, avoiding any further problems occurring, such as impolite messages being received by Evie. From a time perspective, the mother gives advice which impacts upon Evie's life in the present, which may influence a change in her behaviour as a consequence of receiving that advice. However, the mother's advice could be viewed

differently; interfering perhaps. Evie, in this situation, is not thinking for herself and solving the problem, but instead her mother takes over.

Other situations, a little more serious, were demonstrated where parents used the resource to provide information within *time - present*, which influenced how their children behaved. In the following quote this mother is responding to her son's comments on Facebook publically via her mobile.

Mother: ... So he is quite good at ... I have done the odd thing and said don't say that I am bored. You must not be bored. Or I put a comment like – if you are going to say that you are bored please spell it right! So he was highly embarrassed [Int: 2, 11 years].

Parenting within *time - present*, with the ease of access the resource facilitates, offers the potential for parents to interfere in their child's life. In this example the child's communications are not only being checked by the parent, but they are being seen and potentially publically commented on by others. Boyd (2014) found similar in her research, where young people felt that parents would interfere and react to messages they had put on social networking sites. They referred to parents at times as nosy.

The resource is sometimes too easily accessible. Parents are able to respond too easily within *time - present*. The mother in this example could be viewed as micro-managing her child's life; small details within his life are influenced and controlled by his mother. Rather similar to Nelson's (2010) and Fuller's (2010) description of helicopter parenting, as discussed previously (section 2.4.1). Nelson (2010) and Fuller (2010) describe the helicopter parent as very controlling. Parents are involved in all aspects of their child's life; hovering overhead, ready to respond. Decidedly unlike the authoritative style of parenting advocated by Baumrind (1966, 1973), which demonstrates warmth and encouragement, without excessive interference.

As evidenced previously (section 6.3) when discussing behavioural controls, some parents interviewed were very controlling within their child's life. The mobile, as a resource for parenting, has the potential to allow parents to permeate many aspects of their child's life. The parent is always there for the child, simply at the touch of a button, ready to respond. No other resource in the past has been able to have that kind of impact on parenting; allowing parents to influence their child's behaviour at any point within *time - present*.

Could the resource be a risk for child development due to its ease of access? For example parents do not have to speak with the school to be able to access their child during the school day any more. Comments made by one father, also a senior school teacher, illustrate this point.

Father: Phones ought to be banned from school because they don't really need it. They have got the office, if people need to get in touch they can get in touch that way. We get parents ringing them up in the middle of lessons. Why, why is it that important?

I: Why?

Father: They can't separate, bizarre [Int: 3, 11 years].

In the past parents would not have been able to contact their child directly during the school day, unless it was an emergency. However, with the advent of the mobile phone, and with some parents adopting it implicitly as a resource within parenting, they can contact their child at any time. This quote suggests that some parents did, even if it meant interrupting lessons.

Potentially, as mentioned, there might be risks for children if parents are constantly contacting them. Children might fail to resolve things for themselves, and frequently seek advice from parents, as they are always available through the mobile – *parent in their pocket*. Children might be slower in gaining independence, as a consequence of not having confidence in their own ability to resolve problems. Participating parents were already complaining that some of their children were showing signs of being slow to become independent.

Mother 1: So he has seen enough of the world from his bubble to know, that I really don't want to go out there. [...]

Mother 2: Because they have got this umbilical cord that never gets, you know, you wonder if they are going to be testing you, in their 20s [Parent fgp 3].

Here mothers are describing their children's reluctance to explore the local community at 11 years. Parents suggesting that their sons may remain firmly attached to the family even as young adults.

If their sons are not being given the opportunity to engage with the local community or parents are repeatedly checking on them when they do go out, it potentially could influence children's independence; undermining their attempts. Children's reluctance to go out led participating parents to question whether their children wanted to become independent in the future. The same parents had also made similar observations about young people's behaviour. They felt that some young people seemed uncertain about their own behaviours, as the following outlines in relation to texting.

Parent: It is like this texting – I am going in the cinema, and I am doing this. It is like they are in this loop reaffirming their actions ... [Parent fgp 3].

Young people do frequently text each other about what they are doing (Boyd, 2014). Participating parents felt this behaviour meant that they were unsure of themselves.

Parent: You are not using your own judgement as a grown up adult any more. Should I do that, or isn't it the right thing to do? Should I do this or that? Not thinking, oh I am going to make a choice. You are constantly thinking and confirming back. Is it OK if I? [Parent fgp 3].

Turkle (2012) in her work with young people has illustrated similar; young people constantly reporting back to their parents and friends about their actions. Everything they did involved reporting back, checking and wanting others to comment. Perhaps they lacked confidence in behaving independently.

Looking at Erikson's (1963, 1968) theory on emotional development, these behaviours suggest that young people have not been able to successfully negotiate their independence; a key task of adolescence. They do not have the emotional confidence to act without checking with others first. Could this same reluctance towards independence be just starting to emerge within children's behaviour, as evidenced through their hesitancy to explore the local community? If some young people are growing up with a lack of confidence in relation to developing independence and freedom, what is influencing this? It would be interesting to find out more from young people themselves why they need to do this; to report back on their actions. There may be different explanations at work here. Possibly, their behaviours might be influenced by others around them; checking has become part of their culture; it is what they do. However, there may be other underlying reasons, as discussed, in relation to parents trying to be too controlling within young people's lives, undermining their confidence, making independent behaviours more difficult to achieve. Further research would need to be undertaken to explore this issue more closely with young people, as well as children.

Where parents have a tendency to be too controlling, the mobile phone as a resource allows them easy access to their children. It provides additional opportunities for this type of controlling parenting, helicopter parenting (Fuller, 2010; Nelson, 2010), to continue. The consequence of such actions on children might be for them to become uncertain about their own behaviour and demonstrate reluctance towards independence. In fact Oxfam (2013) comments that helicopter parenting can be associated with children's failure to develop their independence. Potentially, could the resource be demonstrating risks to child development? Exploring this issue further with children / young people and parents would reveal a better understanding.

The mobile phone as a resource for parenting within *time - present*, although it presents important opportunities for parents to be able to support their children, it is not always so helpful for children's development. In fact, it could potentially

create risks for children's development, particularly where parents have a tendency to be too controlling. Psychologists could help support parents with use of the resource, so they use it appropriately with their children. Importantly, demonstrating to parents the potential risks of overuse with children's development. Frequently, research talks about children / young people overusing their devices (Ki Parks, 2009; Boyd 2014), but perhaps, as discussed here, there are risks of parents overusing the mobile with their children. Providing parents with support may avoid such issues from occurring, and thus encourage parents to provide more opportunities for their children to become independent. Children's development may then not be compromised, helping children to negotiate Erikson's (1963, 1968) emotional stages successfully; achieving some independence.

7.2.3.3 Sharing the parenting role

The mobile phone as a resource for parenting, as well as allowing parents to support their children, it also enabled them to share parenting responsibilities. The mobile nature of this resource facilitating flexibility within parenting, as the following demonstrates.

Sometimes other members of the family, such as extended family, might take on responsibilities of child care temporarily. For example as Cole et al. (2005) and Bornstein (2012) have discussed, grandparents may take on the parenting role for a short time. There was evidence of this occurring within parents' discussions.

Mother: Mummy and grandma had been out and we left her with granddad, hadn't we?

Lilly-Mae: He said that I could watch TV. He said that I could watch TV all day.

Mother: She takes you literally.

All: Laughing [Int: 7, 9 years].

In this example the parenting role has been transferred to a grandparent. It can be helpful for parents to share their responsibilities with grandparents, who are interested in the children. As Bornstein (2012) maintains it can be supportive for parents and children. In this example the mother can remain connected to the family and deal with any issues should they arise via the resource. Sharing the parenting role in this way provides flexibility within parenting, which might not exist without the resource, as the connection between parent and child would be more difficult to maintain.

However, within one interview it was apparent that a child was periodically taking on the parenting role. By having a mobile she was also taking on parenting responsibilities, but similar to the previous example, only on a temporary basis, as her mother describes.

Mother: Well another one of the main reasons, and I don't think that she wants to mention it in case that it upsets me, with my seizures. If Tee is out with me she knows that she can get Dad. She can call for help. She knows that ... we have always said to her to remember whereabouts she is or a shop that she is near, so that she can instantly get help. So that she is safe and can get help. That is one of the reasons why she has got a very good phone.

I: If anything happened it would fall to Tee to get help?

Mother: Yes [Int: 9, 10 years].

In this example Tee, at only 10 years of age, having access to a mobile phone was vital for family functioning. Tee was helping to keep her family safe. If anything should happen to her mother, a seizure, she would be the one that was responsible for managing the situation; calling for help and caring for her little brother. What is surprising about this example, parenting is not being shared with another responsible adult, which would normally occur. Sometimes this is not an option within families. Tee does not comment about taking on these parenting responsibilities, but it could be worrying for her. Within some families children do take on responsibilities where parents have a health problem. As Aldridge and

Becker (1993, 1999) discuss, there are many young carers who help care for a sick or disabled parent.

In relation to discussions about the mobile phone as a resource, these different examples illustrate how supportive the resource can be for parenting. The resource is flexible allowing roles and responsibilities within parenting to be shared, not only with ease, as in the example with grandparents, but quickly in an emergency, as in Tee's situation. The mobile phone can be a flexible resource within parenting. Importantly, allowing parents to maintain a close connection with their family when apart.

Overall, the subtheme *time - present*, as a constituent of time (Cottle, 1976; Hart-Davis, 2011), shows that for some parents the mobile phone has become an essential resource for parenting. Sometimes as a resource it can be useful, supporting both children and parents. Equally, it might create risks for children's development if overused, with parents becoming very accessible to children – *parent in their pocket*. Thinking about *time – present* beyond opportunities and concerns provided a different perspective on parenting and the mobile phone, adding to literature within the field. *Future* time is able to bring a different perspective on the meaning of mobile / internet devices for parents.

7.2.4 Time - Future

Time – future or future time also influenced parents' thinking about children's use of mobile / internet devices and their social development. When parents spoke about the future, they would often speak about their children's lives. Researchers suggest that looking into the face of a child can bring forth thoughts about the future (Livingstone et al., 2012). Some parents interviewed were very interested in their children's future lives and what part mobile / internet devices might play.

7.2.4.1 Parents' views on their children's future lives

Many of the parents interviewed saw their role as providing the best they could for their children. This included helping them to prepare for the future. In the following extract from a focus group, parents outline what they could provide in readiness for their children's futures.

Parent: I think that it is very easy for us to go, I am going to buy them... put my children through private school, buy them what I think is the best. And mix in the right social circles [Parent fgp 3].

Some parents felt able to provide their children with almost anything, or at least they reported they could. Providing their children with access to mobile / internet devices was just part of it.

Parent: We have got, what have we got? Play station 3. We have got the Wii. We have also got the big media centre which is a gigantic PC [Parent fgp, 3].

Here, a few of the devices that one family had access to.

Some parents believed that mobile / internet communications were going to be a big part of their children's lives in the future, as the following quote from one parent focus group demonstrates.

Parent: You might say in 20 years' time that it is a level of communication that they need to learn. It is a basic development, like picking up the phone [Parent fgp 1].

But they did wonder what impact these devices might have on their children's communication skills and social development now, if they were going to start using them from a young age. *Parent: Communication can be misinterpreted that is more my point. Children that are learning social skills. They don't know [Parent fgp 1].* Here, parents had been discussing how easily it was for communications on the internet to be misinterpreted, in a way that might not occur within face to face interactions. Parents were suggesting that children

might not always understand the need to be careful with their internet communications, as they were just learning social skills. This very point was illustrated within chapter 5 where Vanessa failed to consider her friend's feelings, whilst communicating via Facebook (section 5.4.2.2).

Parents had different views about how they should progress with their children's mobile / internet communications. Would children be disadvantaged socially as a consequence of using them now? Or as highlighted in the interview below, should children be prepared for the future, by providing them with as much access as possible.

Parent 1: My biggest bug bear I have issues with technology and allowing the kids access to the internet and mobile phones. But Paul just says they need to have a go at this technology, and it is the way forward. And so against my wishes Lucy has a computer in her bedroom. Which I don't, I don't agree with. But Paul says that is where it is going.

Parent 2: He has a point. Their contemporaries will... their schoolwork, it will provide a background [Parent fgp 3].

Some parents were keen for their children to be ready for the future; thus they did what they could to prepare them now. Parents made sure their children had access to all the right devices, as well as the opportunity to learn how to use them. This meant their children would develop skills necessary for the future. *Parent: Paul always goes, hand eye co-ordination will excel [Parent fgp 3].*

However, as other parents suggested in their focus group, spending too much time on these devices now might in fact have detrimental consequences on children's development. To illustrate their concerns, mothers discussed the introduction of computers in nurseries; highlighting the inappropriateness of this so early in childhood.

Mother: I don't think that computers should be in nurseries. Should not be in nurseries. You see them all on doing these colourings and I think... what is wrong with paint, clay and all that messy play. They are going to be able to do that

[computers] before they are able to do the other things. That drives me nuts when you see it, just keep the electrical equipment away from them [Parent fgp 2].

This particular mother felt that there was too much urgency in society for children to become skilled users of these devices, in preparation for their future lives.

Contrasting views were thus apparent amongst parents, with some feeling that it was essential their children develop skills in readiness for the future. Others however were unsure of where it would lead if children were communicating on devices so early in childhood, and how it might impact upon their development. Researchers similarly have found mixed views amongst parents (Ling & Helmersen, 2000; Haddon & Vincent, 2014).

7.2.4.2 Great expectations

Some parents within the research had high expectations for their children. They felt their children should be skilled users of mobile / internet devices right now.

Parent: She knows how to do a podcast, and she is really interested. And I am thinking, oh God, at last Lucy is interested, and she has found something, other than her hair. Yeah. She created her own website the other day [Parent fgp 3].

Great things would now be expected of Lucy. Such parents were highly focused on their children's future development and provided them with every opportunity to do well. However, sometimes this approach can create too much pressure on children; resulting in feelings that they might not be able to live up to their parents' expectations.

Layard and Dunn (2009) have talked about assertive or competitive parenting. These are parents who invest heavily in their children. In some situations these parents not only ensure their children are doing well, such as becoming highly skilled in their use of devices, as demonstrated, but they also want to ensure they are doing better than other children. Layard and Dunn (2009) believe that this

assertive or competitive approach to parenting is not always healthy for children's development. Considering Layard's and Dunn's (2009) comments, some parents were indeed putting pressure on their children. This may have detrimental consequences for children's development, depending upon the individual child, as Layard and Dunn (2009) suggest. Evidence of this can also be found within chapter 5 (section 5.2.2.3), where Leah struggles to write emails, which her mother expected to be perfect. It can be helpful to have supportive parents; encouraging children's development now and for the future. However, it seems that there are also risks. Some parents can become overly supportive and concerned about their children's development, which they demonstrated in their discussions.

Children need to be able to live their lives now and not purely based on what the future might hold for them. Within these discussions there seems to be elements of what has been mentioned previously, Nelson's (2010) and Fuller's (2010) notion of helicopter parenting; with parents trying to become too controlling within their children's lives. Evidence of this has also been found recently by Mascheroni (2014) who has researched children's (10 - 13 years) use of devices. She found that helicopter parents tended to be critical and controlling of their children's use of devices, whereas authoritative parents were more encouraging.

When speaking to a group of young adults about children's use of mobile / internet devices, they felt that middle years children did not need to be using devices now. *R1: I don't think that it is necessarily right for them to have mobile phones [Ypfgp 3, 23 - 30 years].* Some young adults commented that they had not grown up with mobiles and yet had learnt how to use them.

R2: It feels like second nature to me and I was not brought up with phone technology. ... Yes, it is something that you encounter. And you develop the skills to deal with it. ... But for our generation we have got on top of it all; we can use the internet and mobiles; we did not have them as kids. [...] They will be able to learn how to do it [Ypfgp 3, 23 - 30 years].

Young adults were suggesting that it was not necessary for children to be highly skilled users of devices now; they could learn these skills gradually. Haddon and Vincent (2014) maintain that children's skills on devices vary, with skills generally developing gradually.

Individuals do not have to be brought up with communication technology to learn how to use it. So why was there such urgency on the part of some parents for their children to become highly skilled users of devices? In some situations parents seemed to be behaving as Layard and Dunn (2009) suggest; being too assertive and competitive in their parenting. They were putting their own competitive instincts before the needs of their children. There was a need to let children be children; play and have fun, instead of preparing them for the future.

Not all parents held such great expectations. Some parents reported that they felt under pressure to supply their children with mobiles and other devices, which they did not always respond to, as they did not feel it was appropriate.

Mother: [...] I wish they were not influenced so much and they were allowed to be children instead of having to grow up so quickly. And I feel that if they did not have the peer pressure as well. Making them feel that they have to have ... everything [...] But it is advertising isn't it, which can be a bad influence a lot of the time [Int: 5, 10 years].

This has always been a dilemma for parents; children demanding different technologies, depending on which ones are considered cool at a particular time. At least this parent had a more practical approach to parenting. She was aware of all the influences pushing her children into having different devices. She tried to maintain a more balanced approach to parenting, by not responding to all her children's demands, and encouraging them to play.

Parents need to carefully judge what is right for their child's development and try not to be overly competitive, as evidenced earlier. Different realities were apparent amongst parents on preparing children for the future. There were those parents who felt it was better to prepare children now, whilst others, similar

to young adults, who felt that children should be allowed to be children, and not to become overly involved with their devices too soon. As Haddon (2013) states parents need to carefully decide how they are going to parent children's use of devices. It seems how parents relate to their children's future lives is part of this process. Children do not need to have their lives swamped with up-to-date technology in readiness for the future. Parents should not let the opportunities that lie ahead totally determine and dominate what children are doing now. It is important to think about children's future lives but not to base most of children's activities now on what lies ahead. This will allow children to develop social skills without pressure. Expectations were high amongst some parents about children and their devices, but this was not necessarily always helpful for children.

7.2.4.3 Parents' views on their own future parenting role

Parents' discussions about *future - time* involved focusing on their children's future lives, which as Hammond (2012) highlights frequently occurs when parents think about the future. There were few discussions about their own futures, or how their parenting role might change as a consequence of their children growing up. As Bornstein (2012) discusses, parenting has to change in line with the changing needs of the child.

One parent however was able to visualise how her parenting role would change as a result of her children growing up. She was very clear about this change.

Mother: I think it is something that my children will need to learn to do ... I can't be spending my time organising Harriet's social life for her for the rest of her life. They have got to take these steps towards adulthood; towards leaving home. For that reason I think that a mobile is fine [Parent fgp 1].

This mother felt that her daughter would need to learn how to organise her own social life in the future. This would be a step towards freedom and

independence. A step that her mother felt was essential for Harriet to take. She was able to visualise how this change would impact upon her role as parent.

Most participating parents seemed keen to keep their children safe. However, here was a parent who was aware of the importance for children to develop independence and freedom. She had a clear idea on how her parenting role would change over time. Many discussions with parents reflected concern and control. In contrast this mother was recommending independence and freedom for her daughter's future.

Overall, the subtheme *time – future*, has shown how children's future lives held meaning for their parents, in relation to mobile / internet devices. The findings demonstrate different views amongst parents about the emphasis that should be placed on children's future lives; some parents placing a great deal of emphasis on their children's futures, whilst others less so. These different realities were also reflected in how parents behaved towards their children now, particularly through the opportunities they provided with mobile / internet devices. All parents interviewed felt they were being supportive to their children with their devices. Thoughts about the future were generally considered as a necessary part of that support.

7.3 Reflection

7.3.1 Parental support

On reflection, now that most of the findings have been presented, I was impressed with how keen these parents were to support their children. However, psychologically, I felt that some parents needed support themselves in trying to understand the impact of their behaviours on their children, particularly in relation to mobile / internet devices. Some parents showed signs of over-involvement.

The idea of support for parents themselves received mixed reactions. Some parents interviewed when asked about support were not keen and did not feel they needed it. However, there were others who held quite different views. They enjoyed coming together within their focus groups and discussing their children's use of these devices, finding it helpful and supportive.

Parent 1: ... It is nice to know that it is all normal.

P2: Yes.

P1: It makes me think that there needs to be more forums for parents like this.

P3: Well if your son goes on a shooting up a game, I feel a whole lot better [Parent fgp 3].

Parents found hearing others' comments reassuring. Perhaps they sometimes felt somewhat alone in their thinking and were thus happy to have the opportunity to come together and share their experiences with others in a similar position; helping to reach a shared meaning. As a parent myself, I found their views helpful too, particularly where parents were more experienced than myself.

Parents had mixed views about their children using mobile / internet devices so young and discussing their thoughts together seemed to help. Evidence shows that parents have uncertainties and questions about children and mobile / internet devices (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Ofcom, 2012b). Forums, such as the focus groups undertaken here, might be helpful for parents in the future, as a way for parents to share their thoughts and concerns. They could be joined by young people and their parents who have undergone similar experiences, and would be able to share their expertise. Personally, I found young people's / young adults' views supportive. They had actually experienced some of the communications and behaviours children discussed. Their thoughts on children's use of these devices were sometimes more balanced than those of parents. Young adults for example demonstrated that some of the behaviours parents had concerns about might not be relevant in the future.

Overall in this research, parents were keen to know about children and their devices, and to be able to support them. However, there seems to be a lack of support available for parents. Recently, Ofcom (2013) has suggested similar to the research here, that parents would like to know more to be able to support their children, which they suggest, would help build parents' skills and confidence. As Byron (2008, 2010) identified, parents were becoming more informed about children's / young people's devices. Nevertheless it would seem that there is still more to do. Although Government policy did not feature within parents' discussions, but was discussed within the chapters, it does have an important role to play in promoting children's use of their devices. Further, this has links with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory where he talks about social settings 4 – national and local. National and local policies can influence the way children and parents are supported with children's devices. There seems to be a lack of support, particularly in the form of group support, as created here through the focus groups, which parents might find helpful. National and local policies, through health and education, could promote such initiatives for parents, alongside the support that is currently being undertaken in schools for children.

7.3.2 Time and Settings

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, looking at different social settings and how they interact with child development, has been discussed throughout the thesis. Social settings 3, environments the child is not in and how they influence development, has been discussed in this chapter, along with settings 5 *time*, which is particularly relevant to this chapter. Social settings 5 *time* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was fundamental within this chapter on *time*. Parents were thinking about their children's lives in terms of *time*. In all the constituents of *time* parents were thinking about children's social development and how they could support them. *Time* perhaps would not normally be thought as a setting for social development. As discussed earlier, individuals live their lives through

time with *past*, *present* and *future* the main constituents (Cottle, 1976; Hart-Davis, 2011). Yet it exists as a setting; a social setting that allows children's development to progress, with parents providing support, based upon the age and needs of the child at a particular moment in time.

But what of children's thoughts about *time*; what realities did they anticipate for the future? Participating parents did not find it difficult to anticipate the future or think back to the past. Their realities of life allowed them to do this because they had experienced both; they could remember the past and they were able to visualise the future. However, for children this was a little more difficult. Their lives had been short in comparison; they could not remember much of the past and had very limited perspectives on the future. Children's realities about their future lives seemed to centre on what device they were going to get. If they did not have a mobile phone now for example, they saw it as quite a natural step that they would be getting one in the future, as the following demonstrates.

Leah: I could be using my phone if I get one.

I: You would like a phone would you?

Leah: Yeah.

I: What sort of phone would you like?

Leah: A Samsung Galaxy.

I: A Samsung Galaxy. Right. What is special about the Samsung Galaxy?

Leah: Well, they are really good and they are just like the iPhone 4s but they are cheaper [Int: 8, 10 years].

Not only did children assume that they would be getting a mobile phone, but they had carefully planned exactly what type of mobile they would be getting. Children's views about their futures seemed to be fairly simple; it was just a matter of getting a mobile phone. With it would come, undoubtedly, a variety of different freedoms and social settings, which as yet they had not considered.

In chapter 2 emphasis was placed on finding out from parents about their role with middle years children and their devices. Parents views are considered because of the important role they have with middle years children. The research here found that parents were mediating children's device use. They were generally supportive and sometimes tried to negotiate with children. More recent research has encouraged parent negotiation with children about their devices as an effective approach to parenting (Mascheroni, 2014). Yet there were also parents who were too involved in their children's lives and tended to over-monitor children's device use, which was not helpful.

7.4 Conclusions

Chapter 7 has demonstrated that parents were thinking about how best they could support their children's social development with these devices. Children's social development could be supported across *time*; now and in the future, with the past having an influence on parents' thinking processes too. Chapter 7 addresses the research question - *What are parents' views about their role within children's use of mobile phones / internet devices.*

The mobile phone as a *resource* within parenting, as demonstrated in the subtheme *time - present*, is interesting new knowledge. It was found that it could be supportive of children's development, but there were risks associated with their development if parents were able to operate so freely within *time - present*, which the mobile phone as a resource facilitated. This was particularly evident where parents adopted the new style of parenting to emerge, helicopter parenting (Nelson, 2010, Fuller, 2010). Over time psychologists have seen different styles of parenting to emerge, as discussed (section 2.4). Much of the past for psychologists has involved steering parents away from harsh parenting practices and encouraging more positive approaches to parenting. The recent emergence of helicopter parenting (Nelson, 2010; Fuller, 2010) is less than positive for children's development, and with parents having ready access to

the resource, could prove particularly unhelpful for some children, resulting in too much parental involvement.

Helicopter parenting appears more prominent where parents' concerns are high. They were concerned about children's use of mobile / internet devices as *young users*, as well as other aspects of children's lives, such as developing freedom. The research here has shown that where parents have concerns about children's devices they can be very restrictive with children's use, despite their children being competent users. Other researchers too have found similar effects with children and young people (see Tripp, 2010; Mascheroni, 2014; Boyd, 2014). Similarly, Clark (2014) has investigated parenting and young people. She found that where parents felt unprepared for the challenges of mobile devices they tended to be over-involved in young people's lives; constantly monitoring their behaviours. It appears that the effects found here with children's use of devices and parents' concerns is not uncommon.

Bringing the themes together as a framework on *freedom* could help identify parents' approach with children's devices. Similar to the other themes within the thesis, the theme *time* with its subthemes could be used to create a measure as part of a psychological tool, not for children as in the other themes, but for parents. Details about parenting approaches adopted with children's use of devices could be identified. For example considering how the resource is used in parenting; *resource* or *risk* in relation to child development, revealing *supportive* or *controlling* approaches to parenting. Support and control could form the basis of this psychological tool.

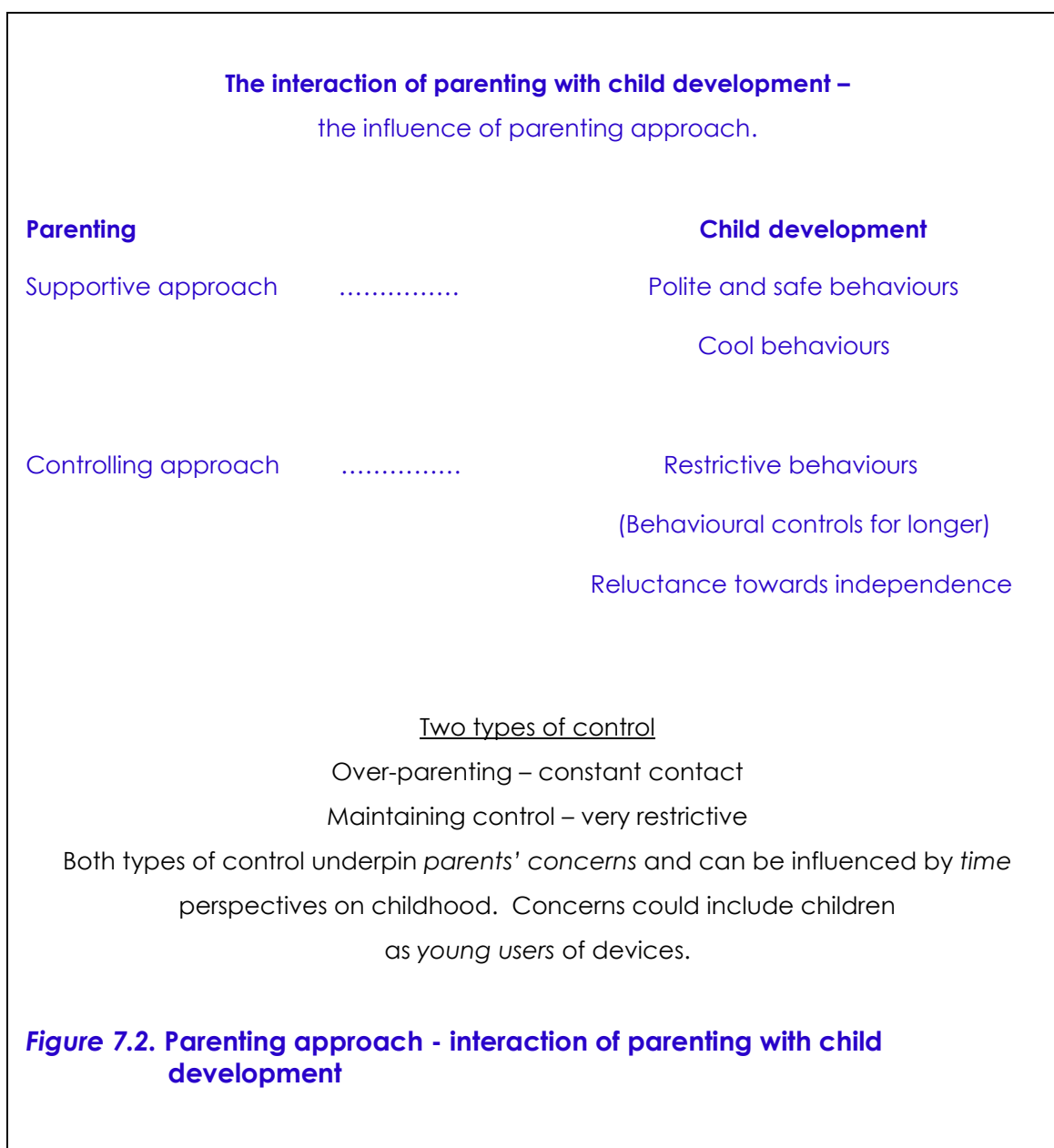
Other measures with parents could also be used, for example psychological tools in ascertaining their general approach to parenting (parenting style), using Braumrind's (1966, 1973) parenting typology for example. Further, looking at parents' approach to mediation of devices by using Valkenburg et al.'s (1999, 2013) styles of mediation. These tools might help psychologists understand what

is happening with children's development and the relationship between children and parents.

Some of the challenges that parents face with children's devices, as previously mentioned, can be supported by psychologists. They have the skills to address parents' concerns. Through *health promotion* work with parents, psychologists can help them to develop an understanding about how their parenting style is affecting their child's behaviour, particularly helicopter parenting. Supporting parents through health promotion, psychologists can also emphasize the importance of negotiation with children and their devices rather than control (see Valkenburg et al. 1999; 2013; Mascheroni, 2014). Further, the importance of parents' learning to understand children's lives today, which is different from what they experienced when young, could be discussed. Being less nostalgic about the past may help. Psychologists focusing on these aspects of parenting through health promotion, may encourage parents to be more understanding of children's lives with their devices.

From a theoretical perspective, beginning to gradually pull the themes together, and suggesting the development of psychological tools, there are some points to note about interactions between children and parents. A further conceptual framework seems to exist, beyond that which has been created here about freedom. This new framework is about interactions between parents and children (Figure 7.2).

The framework is called *parenting approach - interaction of parenting with child development*. It identifies two parenting approaches *supportive* and *controlling*. Both demonstrating a potentially different impact on child development. *Supportive parenting* may be evident in the following way. *Cool behaviours* on devices from middle years children demonstrating that they are developing normally towards expected targets for their age as they move closer to becoming young people.



Polite and safe behaviours from middle years children on their devices, demonstrating that they are being appropriately supported by their parents and developing normally (perhaps even better than some young people). In this situation interaction between parenting and child development demonstrates positive outcomes for children.

In contrast, *controlling parenting*, is not positive for child development, and may be evident in the following two ways. With the first type of control children demonstrate a *reluctance towards independence*. These children are *over-parented*; parents are constantly checking on what they are doing within the scope of freedom they have been allowed. The second type of control leads to *restrictive behaviours* on devices for middle years children, demonstrating that they are not developing normally towards expected targets for their age, as they move closer to becoming young people. They experience *behavioural controls* for longer than might be expected for their age. Both these types of control might suggest that children are not being appropriately supported by their parents and not meeting their developmental targets at the normal time.

These two different types of controlling parenting have different motives, and link with earlier discussions (see section, 6.5). The first, over-parenting; children are not being given the opportunity to think for themselves, because parents feel the need to be overly involved. The second, control; parents have to maintain control over their child no matter what, so the child's behaviours are restricted. Within both types of controlling parenting interactions between parents and children are likely to lead to negative outcomes for children.

This new conceptual framework is able to explain and bring together different elements of the research. It essentially highlights how *parenting approach* can impact upon children's development with devices. Further, by comparing children with young people (through *cool* behaviours for example), children's developmental progress or lack of progress may be understood. This new conceptual framework creates a cohesive basis for the findings of this research. The future for this new conceptual framework is uncertain at present, as it is very much a latent development, but one worthy of further thought beyond the thesis.

In the research *parents' concerns* were often the reason why they were so controlling with their children. One common concern was associated with

children being a special group (*early users of devices*) as mentioned. Parents' experiences of childhood from *time – past* did not match with their children's experiences in *time – present*; a generational difference in perspective on communication with devices existed between them. Past and present coming together within their interactions. Parents' concerns about their children and reflections on past childhoods seemed to be an interwoven process. For parents it was simply their way of trying to understand children's social development.

The theme *time* demonstrates parents' thoughts about their role with children's mobile / internet devices through the different constituents of *time*. Bringing together perspectives from different generations of participants enabled the theme *time* to be recognized from its initial identification within parents' discussions. Being a parent is a lifetime commitment, so perhaps it was not surprising that *time* featured so strongly within parents' discussions, particularly *future - time*. All three themes have been presented, and Chapter 8 now brings these themes together.

Chapter 8: Critical reflection on the research

8.1 Introduction

The findings of this research produced three themes – *appropriate communications*, *freedom* and *time*, demonstrating children's social development with their devices, and how parents supported and would continue to support children's use. Chapter 8 will summarise these themes and discuss how they work together as a framework on freedom. The research process itself will also be critically reflected upon within this chapter.

8.2 Summary of the themes and how they work together creating a framework

The themes were developed from participants' views addressing the research questions about the meaning of mobile / internet devices to children (7 – 12 years), and the role played by parents in children's use. The first two themes relate to children, and the final theme relates to parents.

Within the first theme *appropriate communications*, participating children demonstrated they were keen to be polite in the different ways they communicated on their devices. They found it inappropriate when others were not polite to them, but they were not intimidated by this. They were able to learn from these experiences. It seemed that the safety information they had been given by parents and school helped them to cope with impolite situations they encountered.

Children were enjoying the modern day communication experience, some with the latest cool device. Communication on mobile / internet devices was special to them. Receiving replies was seen as even more special; almost perceived as if receiving a gift; a social gift. This was different to the way the contrasting sample, young people, perceived receiving replies; they were often ambivalent. Visual and auditory cues were particularly important to children's communication, helping them to understand communication from others. These devices were frequently new to children's understanding, so cues were important.

Theme 2 was about *freedom*, children's *emerging freedom*. This theme demonstrates potentially a new concept within middle childhood, emerging phases of freedom, which may be present for young people too but with different phases. Children's phases of freedom were about behavioural and social freedoms, supported and mediated by parents. To facilitate children's need for freedom, some parents provided them with a mobile phone, so that they were all able to keep in contact whilst apart. As the story unfolded mobile phones seemed to have a key role in children's social development; the emergence of greater freedoms away from family and a move towards closer friendships outside the home, supported by the mobile phone.

The first phase of freedom to emerge was *behavioural control*, which dominated the early part of middle childhood. Parents put tight controls in place; affecting both children's social interactions and outdoor play. The second phase to emerge was *metaphorical leash*, most commonly associated with middle childhood. *Metaphorical leash* was about the gradual introduction of some freedoms but these were closely monitored by parents through children's devices. Finally, towards the end of middle childhood, some children were experiencing the next phase – *freedom: early beginnings*. This type of freedom was similar to that experienced by some young people. A few children were experiencing this phase of freedom. They tended to be some of the older children, who carefully negotiated their freedom with parents.

The final theme *time*, which arose mainly within parents' discussions, demonstrates that parents were thinking about children's use of these devices in terms of children's social development across time (past, present and future). Parents reflected back on their own social development at a similar age to their children (past), to help understand their children's needs. Parents thought about what mobile / internet devices meant within their children's lives now and how these devices could support their development (present). They also considered how these devices could be used to support their children's future lives (future). Thinking in terms of *time* helped parents to make sense of what mobile / internet devices meant within their children's lives and what impact this might have on their own parenting role. Some parents felt the need to be supportive, whilst others were more controlling.

The first theme explores children learning how to communicate appropriately on mobile / internet devices, setting the context. Children's devices were important to them for communication, which parents generally appreciated. The second theme shows children's desire to be socially interacting and out with friends. This was a gradual process. It was negotiated between children and their parents, but ultimately determined by parents based upon different levels of behavioural control, which included different mediation strategies. The final theme comes closer to parents' thinking about children and their devices, with the prominence of parental support for some parents, but parental control for others which sometimes meant limited or no access to devices for children. The three themes together give meaning to children's use of their mobile / internet devices, supported by parents.

For parents the mobile phone was used as a resource for parenting, allowing them to maintain close contact with their children when apart. In some situations this would occur on a frequent basis, which could pose a risk to children developing freedom by restricting it. Much seemed to depend upon parents approach to parenting; supportive or controlling. As children became more accomplished at managing their freedoms, parents felt able to lessen

some of their controls. However, children and parents were keen to be able to maintain close contact when apart, similar to young people and their parents. As anticipated parents played a crucial role in children's use of these devices because of their age; being so young (7 - 12 years) children needed parental support. This was generally different from evidence with young people, where there was less need for parental involvement. They were usually able to manage their own use.

All three themes work together forming a framework. Essentially, the themes explore children's social development, showing that communication, social interaction and being with friends, supported by parents, were all meaningful to children related to their device use. Children needed to be given increasing levels of freedom to support their social development, as they progressed through middle childhood. They were striving for it, but sometimes parents did not help; they would restrict their freedom. Unintentionally it would seem in their efforts to keep their children safe. Some children thus internalized their need for freedom. They were not able to achieve freedom in the external world, so they would try and achieve it internally; in a cyberworld where they felt more comfortable and in control.

Theme 2 *freedom* dominates this discussion and forms a core for the research, with the other two themes as vital support. The themes come together forming a framework on children's *emerging freedom*. Children's freedoms, behavioural and social, are significant within the main theme on freedom but are also evident within the other two themes. The framework will be referred to as

Emerging Freedom: Behavioural and Social Freedoms.

Emerging freedom, as the title outlines, because children are striving for freedom. For them freedom emerges in different phases. Overall, three phases of freedom were described as emerging during middle childhood. Children's experiences

however only tell part of the story. Further phases of freedom are likely to become apparent by looking beyond middle childhood towards young people.

The purpose of this framework, incorporating the three themes, is to develop knowledge about children's use of mobiles / internet devices, but it also provides important knowledge about children's social development; how freedom emerges during middle childhood. The framework provides a structure which might be used by psychologists to explore children's social development.

It is important to note, as discussed in the conclusions of the findings chapters, distinct aspects of children's development and parents' behaviours have emerged within the themes which may help psychologists develop psychological tools for examining children's use of their mobile / internet devices. Suggestions were made about how aspects of the framework could be used as a foundation for psychological assessment tools. For example children's *cool behaviours* and *emerging freedom* with their devices as discussed within the themes, along with Hasebrink et al.'s (2011) theory on *skill development*, and parents' approach to children's use of devices, could be brought together. These different aspects of behaviour providing an understanding about children's development currently. Tables 8.1 and 8.2 outline the themes and subthemes.

Table 8.1

The themes for the Framework.

Appropriate communications
Freedom (Behavioural and Social)
Time (parents' role).

Table 8.2***The Framework: Emerging Freedom, Behavioural and Social Freedoms.***

Appropriate communications	Freedom	Time (parents' role)
Being polite	Behavioural Control	Time – past
Cool communications	Metaphorical Leash	Time present – resourcing the present
Impolite: Receiving negative communications	Freedom: Early beginnings	Time - future

The themes together forming a framework. The framework may be useful in different ways within psychology for the study of child development.

8.3 Critical reflection on the research process

A critical reflection on the research process follows. Of particular focus will be the research design, participants, and methods used. Strengths of this research as well as its limitations will be discussed.

8.3.1 Qualitative research: Design and Epistemology

A particular strength of this research was using a qualitative design to obtain in-depth views from children (7 – 12 years) about their devices. The thesis reflects children's views; their thoughts and ideas. As highlighted in at the beginning of

the thesis, this does not frequently occur in research. Initially, a quantitative study using mixed methods, and then exploring parents' views about children's use of their devices, was proposed. After undertaking some initial work this approach did not feel the right way forward. Following a period of reflection I felt a qualitative approach, asking children themselves, would be a more realistic way ahead. A qualitative approach enabled me to come closer to participants' views, which was vital for exploring the research questions, potentially leading to more revealing findings. Braun's and Clarke's (2006, 2013) approach to thematic analysis was explored and applied to the research design. Thematic analysis was enlightening, allowing me to understand data and meanings in a way that would not have been possible with the previously proposed approach.

On reflection, in the beginning selecting an epistemological basis for the research was challenging. It demanded careful thought. It is easy for the novice qualitative researcher, like myself, to make errors. The researcher has to be clear about which epistemological approach is compatible with the qualitative approach and methods selected. I worked with several different epistemological approaches and learnt about the importance of epistemology, ontology, theoretical perspectives, and methods working together. I decided that critical realism (Maxwell, 2012) would be the most useful way to support developing knowledge within the research, with its focus both on realities and theories working closely together. It was also compatible with thematic analysis.

Critical realism (Maxwell, 2012) was chosen in part because of its focus on participants' realities. I was interested in children's and parents' realities, and wanted children's realities particularly to be the main focus of the research. Critical realism (Maxwell, 2012) also requires the researcher to draw on knowledge from within the field. As there was limited research on children and mobile phones at the start of this research, knowledge from young people, both their views and literature on mobile / internet devices, was further able to inform the research. Realities and theory combined were thus essential resources for developing new knowledge and were used closely together, which some

epistemological approaches do not recognize as a basis for new knowledge. Critical realism (Maxwell, 2012) also helped to conceptualize meaning in a systematic way at each stage of the research process, particularly as it is an epistemological approach specifically designed for qualitative research. Other epistemological approaches would not have been able to help in this way.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on social settings provided important ontological constituents for the development of new knowledge. It enabled the thesis to show how different social settings have an influence on children's behaviour with their devices. Further, and perhaps most importantly, how supportiveness within those social settings could influence children's development. Epistemology (critical realism), ontology and theory, working together to create new knowledge.

Selected as the research design was triangulation; data triangulation. There are debates about the usefulness of triangulation as a research design. Some perspectives feel that it can help develop ideas (Tobin & Begley, 2004), whilst others doubt its value (Sim & Sharpe, 1998). Triangulation helped the research process by bringing together different realities, which confirmed some realities presented and placed doubts about the value of others, as well as broadening the different realities researched. The triangulated research design used was based on triangulating the realities of different generations of participants, in the exploration of children's use of mobile / internet devices. Some of the strengths of using these different realities will be highlighted in more detail.

Young people / young adults had informed realities to share (along with theory). They were the earliest users of these devices. For example young people / young adults were able to inform, if in their view, a particular trend associated with the mobile or internet was likely to continue for children. Young people / young adults had lived through similar experiences. They could describe how some of the trends relevant to children now might not be so relevant to them in the future. Young people / young adults were much more informed on such

issues compared to parents. In some situations they were more realistic about children's use of these devices than parents were themselves.

Parents' realities and children's realities needed to be studied together to develop an understanding about children's use of these devices during middle childhood. Their lives are so entwined at this stage of child development. Not to do so, I feel, would have resulted in an incomplete picture emerging about children's social development, and what was influencing some of their behaviours.

All these different generations of participants were bringing something of value to the research. This discussion highlights the benefits of applying a triangulated design within this research, as well as discussing other aspects of the design.

8.3.2 Participants: Access and Methods

Accessing children's realities required much work and careful thought. Children are seen as a vulnerable group within research (BPS, 2010). It was important to ensure that participating children felt happy and comfortable and not distressed about being involved. Children and their parents were fully informed about the research through discussions and correspondence from me, and decided together about participation. When working with children of different ages it is essential to be mindful of their age, cognitive development, as well as language abilities. A child of 7 years old has an understanding and ability to communicate which is quite different from that of a 12 year old. On reflection, having previously worked with children as a children's nurse, I found skills developed professionally were helpful in undertaking focus groups and interviews with them, as well as the development of their research documentation. I knew what to expect from children of different ages, and was able to apply this developmental knowledge within the research.

There was less participation from younger children (7 / 8 year olds) than hoped for, a limitation of this research. All children who participated were from middle childhood, with many between 9 - 10 years of age. In part, less participation from younger children might have been because they were only just starting to engage with mobile / internet devices. The younger children who did participate were less able than the older ones to do so without becoming distracted. It was not too detrimental for the research that younger children did not participate. Instead, insights into their views and behaviours were provided by parents.

If researching with younger children in future about their devices, a slightly different research approach could be used to attract their participation. For example, using more pictures and drawings as other researchers suggest (Alderson & Morrow, 2004, 2011; Fraser et al., 2004). Haghish and Teymoori (2013) found the use of numerous pictures could improve the quality of responses given by children, compared to using a mixture of pictures and verbal materials. Children could be invited to take pictures of objects that are important within their lives and discuss them. Pictures of mobile phones and other devices might be included, and questions asked to find out what they think about them. This would make participation more fun for younger children.

Giving children a voice was important to the research. But one or two children did not take the opportunity as fully as they might. Thus another limitation was getting close to their views, as the following explains. Greig et al. (2007) maintain that having parents present during an interview can inhibit some children from speaking openly. Sometimes, in this situation the researcher cannot be sure that the child is providing responses that relate to his / her true feelings; the child may simply be responding in a way expected by the parent. Occasionally, I found it difficult to get close to a child's real thoughts, which I felt might be due to the parent being there. The child concerned might have responded differently if the parent had not been there. Closed responses such as yes or no answers would be given by the child, with the parent offering their opinion in conjunction with

the child's response. The following quote from a children's interview illustrates this, where Zac tries to discuss how he has been using Club Penguin.

I: So you have been using it very carefully?

Zac: Yeah.

I: So you have worked closely with your Mum and Dad. They have seen that you have used it very carefully, and with that increasing trust and responsibility has come [...]?

Mother: Captain Sensible.

I: Is that your nickname?

Mother: Compared to the other two this is Captain Sensible.

I: Brilliant, well that is a good name to have.

Mother: He plays on something and then I get comfortable with the way that he is playing something. Then we can relax some of the parameters as we go along. But generally speaking I am not very relaxed about the internet full-stop. He is very patient because his friends have a lot more access to a lot more than he does. So I think there is some peer pressure there which I resist with my back bone of steel [Int: 4, 11 years].

Unfortunately, in this situation, Zac is not able to expand upon his initial response. Problems associated with the power relationship between parent and child (Alderson & Morrow, 2004, 2011; BPS, 2010), as this is referred, takes over. Failure to let Zac have a voice in this interview was yet another example of the parental control which dominated their relationship, not just his device use.

The use of a simple questionnaire may be one way to overcome the power relationship between parent and child dominating the discussion, if faced with this situation again. The child is then able to write what he / she thinks without interruption from the parent. Being aware that some parents will take over and speak for their child, and preparing for this, could be an effective strategy to provide as many children as possible with a voice.

Children were given the choice about being interviewed alone or with a parent. As the researcher, in this situation one has to be guided by the wishes of the child and their parent, although it might not be ideal for the research itself. Overall, with a few exceptions, interviewing children and their parents together seemed to help children feel comfortable. But for some children, like Zac, it was more difficult. For Zac to say what he really thought might have been met with difficulties following the interview. He was playing it safe by simply not saying anything. Perhaps he did more with his friends on Clun Penguin than he was prepared to let on, but could not divulge this information in front of his mother.

Accessing some participants' views might have been difficult, but most were able to share their views openly. Using different research methods and different types of participants helped to enrich the research. The diversity of methods, as well as the diversity of participants, were strengths of this research. Different generations of participants provided their views about children and their devices. This led to different types of focus groups and interviews being undertaken with participants as a means of accessing different generational perspectives.

Interaction amongst participants is essential within focus group interviews (Sim, 1998; Webb & Kevern, 2001; Barbour, 2008). On reflection, accessing information from parents and young people was captured in a different way compared to children. Parents and young people would question and comment on one another's remarks, which was far less evident amongst children. With parents and young people this enabled discussions to be taken into areas that I had not previously considered. I was thus able to gain more insights from these participants working together, than if I had interviewed them alone. In comparison, children in their focus groups tended to aim their remarks at me, the moderator, rather than towards each other. Horner (2000) highlights that such situations can occur because of the power relationship perceived between adults and children. I knew participating children were not familiar with undertaking discussion groups, but were more familiar with teacher-led sessions.

They thus might have felt more comfortable aiming their comments at me the moderator leading the group. When undertaking further research with children, by placing focus groups in a more informal setting other than a school, may resolve this problem. The girls' focus group was undertaken at home, where more interaction between participants was observed. The setting itself can thus impact upon how comfortable children feel about making comments to each other within the focus groups, and needs careful thought.

Probes are important within interviews, helping to take information further (Denscombe, 2014). Probes were used within focus groups and interviews with children, but they were perhaps not always used skillfully. For example one child talked about a friend receiving *naughty stuff* via a mobile phone. A probe was not used to find out what was meant by this. Important material was potentially missed, particularly with regard to children's negative communications. Providing the child with some examples, such as bad language perhaps, might have helped to draw out what was exactly meant by *naughty stuff*. Bad language was an aspect of negative communication that children had not mentioned, but might in fact bother them, particularly as they felt appropriate communication was important. Having a teacher present, a requirement from the school, this child perhaps did not want to say anything that might get him into trouble. However, coming from the moderator it might have been received more favorably by the teacher, opening up the discussion.

Although the focus groups were able to provide breadth, individual interviews with children and parents were essential for depth perspectives. Participating children generally did not seem shy or inhibited about speaking with me; someone they already knew. Conversely, if I had not known them it might have taken longer to establish a rapport, and find out their realities. Burman (2006) maintains that by having some prior knowledge of participants can facilitate greater disclosure. For example in interview 5, where Billy (10 years) was interviewed alone, he was happy to talk without his parents being in the same room. Prior knowledge about Billy helped me to talk with him; creating a relaxing

and sometimes amusing interview. Giving children a voice does not often happen for children during middle childhood (Horner, 2000; Alderson & Morrow, 2004). For me the interviews helped to facilitate this opportunity for participating children within the research.

8.3.3: Analysis and Reflexivity

Analysis was carefully undertaken and efforts were made to demonstrate transparency. Reflection is an essential part of analysis and transparency, as the following discusses.

On reflection, learning how to work with transcripts, coding, and the thematic processes involved, were both interesting and challenging for me. Within qualitative research it is important that the findings are seen as credible by other researchers, which facilitates transfer within the academic field (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Dyson & Brown, 2006). To help with transferability the framework on *emerging freedom* is discussed in relation to other research, Ling and Helmersen (2000), Livingstone et al. (2012) and Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015) in the next chapter. Other researchers can then understand where the findings on children's *emerging freedom* fit within the context of children's / young people's use of mobile / internet devices. Further, it is essential to deliver an honest account of the findings. As the researcher I have been rigorous in my efforts to produce detailed and honest findings, using reflection both privately and within the thesis itself, to highlight the meaning of findings, as I perceive them. Using Schön's (1983, 2011) approach to reflection helped me to see beyond the obvious and think further. I was able to reflect privately in a reflective diary and then develop these reflections on the analysis further within the thesis itself. Different researchers might perceive the findings in a different way. It is therefore important within qualitative research to leave an audit trail for others to follow. Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that an audit trail will help others understand the researcher's thinking. An audit trail has thus been created which will allow

other researchers to judge the findings. Chapter 4 demonstrates my thoughts on theme development, along with reflection throughout the thesis.

Writing up crystallized my thinking, as Barbour (2008) notes that it should. As the researcher (analyst and then writer) I began to see some things differently as I started to write. This was particularly apparent within the theme *time*, and the subtheme *time - present*. When I looked at the proposed content, some of it was repetition of previous themes. Consequently, I went back to the original data to think again about what children's use of these devices meant within the parenting role. Rethinking the subtheme *time - present*, ultimately helped to provide a much more insightful understanding about parents' role than was originally intended.

Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) discuss the researcher's own context in life as important within qualitative research. When reflecting back on theme 1 *appropriate communications*, I believe my own context influenced the analysis and emergence of this theme. As a parent of a middle years child, similar to many parents I wanted my daughter communicating with others politely on her devices. I needed to encourage this as her parent. These thoughts were potentially influential in my decision to follow up *appropriate communications* as a theme, although I might not have been conscious of this at the time. Another researcher, whose context in life was different from my own as a mother of a middle years child, may not have perceived politeness as a significant thread to the story. However, I was alert to this particularly within my own role as a parent, and thus could relate to what other parents were saying about the need for their children to be polite on mobile / internet devices. As Kvale (1996) and Braun and Clarke (2013) maintain, the researcher's own experiences and identity help determine meaning within qualitative research.

Further, in relation to the researcher's context, parents' concerns are significant here. Initially, as identified in chapter one, concern about my daughter using these devices at a young age was influential to the research focus. Leading me to ask questions of other parents about their concerns. However, as Berger

(2015) identifies it is important that the researcher, in a situation where he / she may have similar feelings to participants, does not let those feelings influence discussions. I had to ensure that my concerns did not influence the responses of other parents within interviews. My concerns were slightly different from theirs, so I did not voice them. However, as Berger (2015) says having similar feelings can help the researcher understand participants' perspectives. I was able to understand parents' concerns about children using their devices at a young age, up to a certain extent, but not when parents' concerns became almost all encompassing. It was not until their transcripts were fully analyzed that the significance of parents' concerns and its impact on children's lives became apparent. Taking the research into a very important direction; the impact of parents' concerns on children's *emerging freedom*, revealing over-parenting.

Reflexivity can help the researcher to realize the importance of certain issues within their research, which can take him / her in a direction which might not have been originally anticipated. Where the researcher is sensitive to similarities and differences with participants' views, this can help the research (Lietz, Langer and Furman, 2006). Within this research reflection was supportive; helping to open up deeper perspectives.

This section has critically discussed the research process. Highlighted are its strengths but also limitations too, which will be helpful for any further research undertaken with children and parents.

8.4 Conclusions

Chapter 8 has importantly reflected on the processes involved in undertaking this research. The research changed fundamentally from its early origins as a quantitative study to a qualitative one. The twists and turns that are involved within qualitative research can be challenging. However, as Barbour (2008) maintains, it is part of the iterative process that enables the researcher to reach

a much better understanding of the research focus and its findings. Chapter 8 has reflected on the research processes, considering strengths and limitations. How the themes came together forming a framework has been discussed. New knowledge has been created which provides insights for psychologists about how children communicate on their devices and what it means to them currently. These findings relate to participants within the thesis and should be viewed within this context. The findings will be reflected upon in more detail within the next chapter.

Chapter 9: The uniqueness of this research

9.1 Introduction

Developing new knowledge is an essential part of qualitative research (Barbour, 2008). Developing themes from participants' views, combining them with theory, and putting this all together into a framework on freedom, has illustrated for a small group of children their emerging social development during middle childhood, in the early part of the 21st Century.

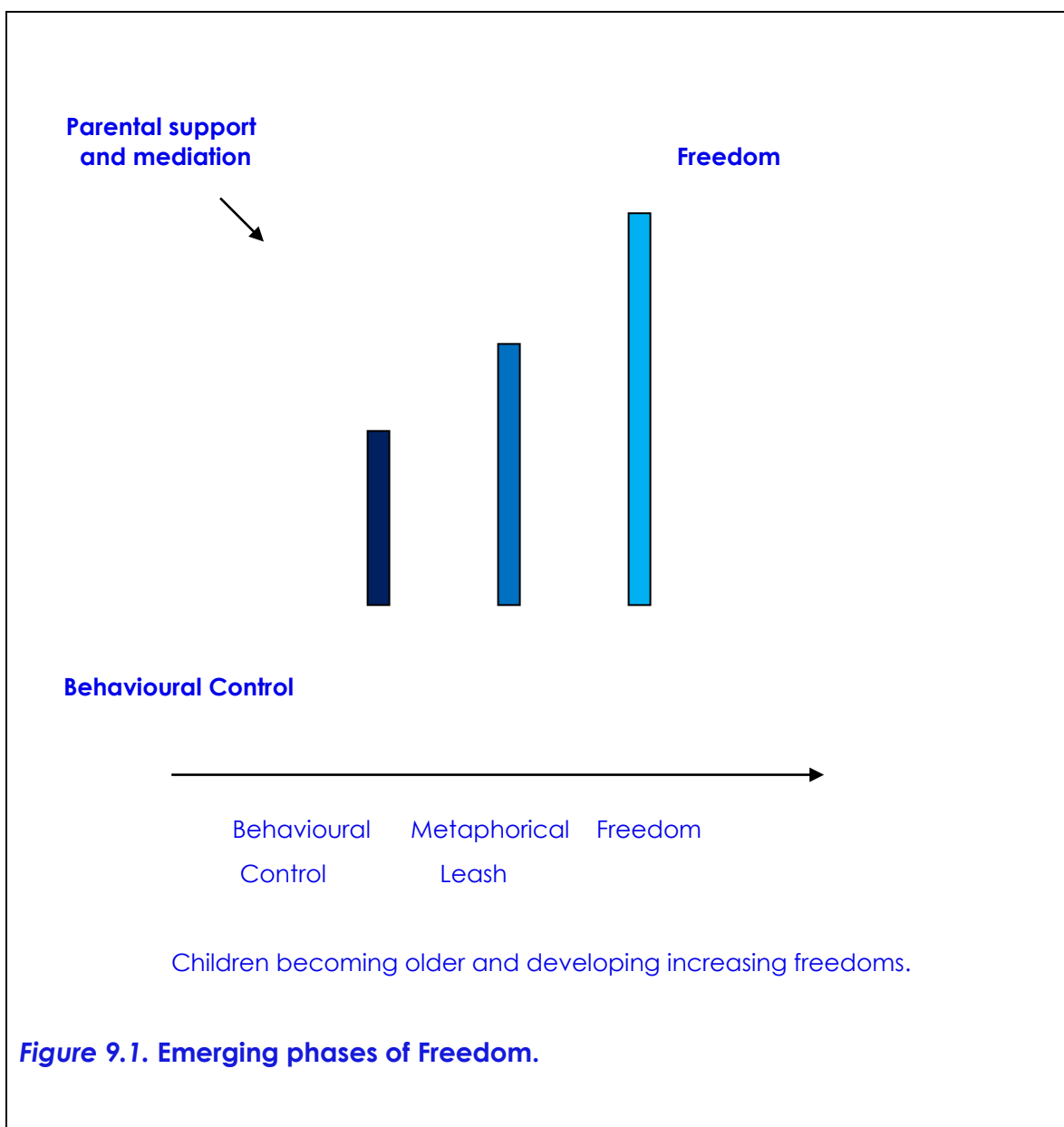
9.2 Unique research

Here the themes and framework on freedom will be discussed further in relation to some of the original ideas that have been created within this research. All developed from participants' views about children's (7 – 12 years) use of mobile / internet devices.

9.2.1 *Emerging Freedom*

The themes describe how mobile / internet devices are providing children with behavioural and social freedoms; the meaning of these devices to them. The themes provide important conceptual ideas about children's social development. Children's social development, in the form of different phases of *emerging freedom* will require further investigation (Figure 9.1). It would be interesting to undertake research with young people, which could illustrate how behavioural and social freedoms emerge for them to a point just before they enter young adulthood. This would provide further knowledge about the

concept of *emerging freedom* beyond middle childhood, and potentially might have links with Arnett's (2000, 2004) concept of emerging adulthood.



Freedom is an aim for children; the ability to have more freedom and independence, moving slowly away from total reliance on the family. The mobile phone, particularly, enables children to start moving through this transition during middle childhood more easily. It helps children to negotiate and achieve the different phases of freedom described within the thesis,

according to their needs. But for some children it can be a struggle, as theme 2 described.

Children become young people, eventually young adults with freedom continuing to develop. They emerge as young adults in their twenties (Arnett, 2000, 2004) forming new and romantic attachments (Shaver & Hazan, 1987; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). These new attachments are important to them. They may still be attached to their parents but the bonds are generally not as strong as once they were. As Arnett (2000, 2004) discusses, forming new attachments and becoming less involved in the family may be a struggle for some.

The struggle for freedom can be demonstrated for some young adults at a very high social level beyond family (settings 1, Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Recent examples from the Middle East will be drawn upon. Rather than the family disrupting young adults' freedom, as discussed with children in theme 2, the State prevents freedom from emerging. For some young adults freedom may become a struggle, not just on an individual level, but at a group or cultural level, linking with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 4 (national, cultural). This struggle for freedom unites them, supported by mobile / internet communications. In the UK their struggles are viewed through the media. Mobile / internet communications are supporting them in countries where oppressive regimes exist or existed, as observed recently in the Middle East. Such countries include Egypt, Libya and Tunisia (Bowen, 2012, 2013), at the time of writing. Young adults have been using mobile / internet communications to organise and unite together against these oppressive regimes (Bowen, 2012, 2013). Being able to use their devices for communication gives them confidence to challenge, in a way that they would never have been able to do before; the power of the internet and mobile phone helping them to strive for freedom, both behaviourally and socially. By discussing young adults' situation here, it illustrates how *emerging freedom* can be very powerful and important; impacting upon individuals' very survival against oppressive regimes.

With reference to the research here, through further work with young people, and perhaps young adults, a more diverse understanding about different phases of freedom could be developed. The characteristics associated with the different phases of freedom that lie beyond middle childhood would be revealed. For young people in the UK, *emerging freedom* may not operate at such a high social level (national), as they do for those young adults described from the Middle East. But it would nonetheless be interesting to explore in relation to their use of their devices, and add to the concept of *emerging freedom*.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on social development was applied as the underpinning theory for this research. His theory was helpful in understanding the different social settings that surround social interaction, and how support can be provided within those settings for social development. However, if an opportunity were to arise to study young people or young adults who were finding freedom a struggle, then it may not be the best theoretical approach to use. Freire's (1970, 1996) theory on social freedom may be a more appropriate theory to use as a theoretical basis. It shows how through education and evolution individuals can realise their need for freedom, which might be a more suitable approach. Certainly if an opportunity were to arise to study individuals experiencing such difficulties, *emerging freedom* would be important to explore, using Freire's (1970, 1996) theory as a basis.

9.2.2 Children's communication cues

Communication cues within mobile / internet communications were particularly important to children; visual and auditory cues (section 5.3.2.3). Valuable visual and auditory cues are sometimes missing in mobile / internet communications, which within face to face interactions would be present. Two children experienced difficulties associated with this. Where valuable cues were missing these children could be insensitive to others, as they admitted failing to

understand the feelings of those they were interacting with. Slonje, Smith & Frisé (2013) have discussed this in relation to young people; missing visual and auditory cues sometimes meant that young people had difficulty understanding how their friends were feeling. Similar misunderstandings, it would appear, are being experienced here by middle years children. Meredith and Stokoe (2014) maintain that such differences between mobile / internet communications and spoken communications are too premature to conclude. However, the research here demonstrates important evidence about communication cues, illustrating how children need visual and auditory cues for understanding, when communicating via these devices. This is further reinforced when considering children's communications via Face Time and Skype, which they particularly found rewarding. Within these forms of communication visual and auditory cues are present, helping communication to be better understood. Other researchers have emphasised the importance of visual and auditory cues for young people / young adults within their mobile / internet communications (Vlahovic et al., 2012). The research here suggests that communication cues are especially important for children, particularly as children are still learning how to communicate socially. The research here has provided examples with middle years children where communication via their devices was misunderstood, as they did not have either visual or auditory cues to help.

9.2.3 The mobile phone as a parenting resource

The themes, as well as providing original evidence on communication and freedom for children, they also demonstrate important original evidence on parents. The mobile phone as a resource for parenting is demonstrated at a conceptual level.

The mobile phone as a resource allowed parents to co-ordinate the family, and helped to reassure them that children were safe. However, it also allowed parents to enter children's *present time* on a much more frequent basis than has

ever been known before. Parents were able to phone and text children at school, for example. As discussed in previously (section 7.2.3.2), although parents found it useful, the mobile as a resource if overused had the potential to create risks for children's social development. It could allow excessive dependency on parents to grow, which might then threaten children's freedom; limiting that freedom. Children may then go on to experience difficulties as they progress through the different phases of freedom; potentially slowing their social development.

Overuse of this resource by parents was linked to parents' concerns about their children. Having the resource facilitated parents' need to check on their children's safety frequently. Parents however need to be cautious that they do not overuse it. The resource has the power to enable parents to infiltrate children's lives frequently within *present time*. These new insights into parents' use of the mobile phone will need further investigation.

9.2.4 Parent in their pocket

The role of parenting over time has changed. Within chapter 2 (section 2.4) attitudes towards parenting were discussed, where comparisons were made between parenting today and during Victorian times. Historically, parenting tended to be strict, whereas now more positive approaches to parenting exist, which advocate rewards and encouragement for children (Home Office, 1998; Sutton, 2000; Byron, 2005). Positive parenting encourages much more discussion and negotiation between parents and their children. But there has been a recent development within parenting which threatens this approach. There is evidence of a more controlling style of parenting to emerge, which has become known as helicopter parenting (Nelson, 2010; Fuller, 2010). This type of parenting is about control; parents strictly controlling many aspects of their children's lives. Similar to Baumrind's (1966, 1973) description of authoritarian parenting.

Helicopter parenting presents a threat to children developing freedom. The mobile phone, as a resource for parenting, is able to meet the needs of helicopter parents, as it facilitates this controlling style of parenting to continue. The resource provides such parents with additional opportunities to assert their control during the school day, which previously was unavailable to them. They are easily able to contact their child at any time. The fear is, with this style of parenting, that children might come to rely too much upon parents and show reluctance towards freedom, as discussed previously (section 7.2.3.2). Glass and Tabatsky (2014) assert that this micromanagement of children's lives discourages them to think for themselves. For these children the mobile phone becomes the *parent in their pocket*; always available.

9.2.5 Time and communication

The theme *time*, which focused on parents' views on children's use of their devices across time, particularly helped to create a generational feel to the research. It brought together mostly parents views, but also young people's / young adults' views. The research applied a triangulated design to explore the realities of these different generations of participants. Maxwell's (2012) ideas on critical realism show that individuals see the world as concepts. Individuals live within the structure of their concepts, which help them to understand the world. These concepts Maxwell (2012) describes may have a time element associated with them, as demonstrated by the different generations of participants within this research. For example, participants had different perceptions about their devices; in some situations younger participants were more open to using devices for communication than was apparent amongst some parents. Demonstrating that individuals hold concepts about how they believe communication should be undertaken. For some participating parents mobile / internet devices posed a threat to their concept of communication, which also included beliefs about how their children should communicate on these devices. Conversely, in comparison, children / young people were more open and less

fixed in the concepts they held about communication, which allowed them to have a more flexible approach than parents when communicating on mobile / internet devices. Time, in terms of different generations and how they perceive communication, was evident within this research.

9.2.6 Social settings

Another original aspect of this research relates to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory. Having developed the framework on children's *emerging freedom* alongside Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, there are some observations to note. His theory provides different social settings that allow development to emerge (Table 9.1). However, participating children did not seem so easily affected by the boundaries which exist within those social settings. At children's fingertips, through mobile / internet devices, was the potential for social freedom, which included the ability to socially interact with who they wanted. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory refers to gradually evolving interactions between the individual and his / her social settings. But perhaps this process is no longer quite as gradual as he perceives. It was evident through this research that his social settings still existed; however it appears that they can be reached much more easily by children now. For example children's devices allowed them to communicate easily with celebrity culture. Some children were able to negotiate Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings with great ease; perhaps with greater ease than any previous generation of middle years children. Recently Vincent (2015) has talked about the changing nature of communication for children, which mobile / internet devices have facilitated for them. Breaking down barriers between and within social settings is perhaps part of this changing nature of communication, providing children with greater social freedom.

Table 9.1

How Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings provide support for the themes and framework on children's Emerging Freedom.

Bronfenbrenner (1979): Social settings for child development.

1. Immediate – home, school, (family and friends)
2. Home (parents) and school (teachers) communicating together
3. Social settings that the child is not in but impact upon his / her development (for example mother's employment)
4. Local and national institutions, as well as culture and traditions
5. Time – children's development over time.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings providing support for the themes and framework on children's *Emerging Freedom*.

1. Immediate – children interacting politely with friends via mobile / internet devices, supported by family and school.
2. Home and School – working together to support children's use of these devices.
3. Environments the child is not in but affect development – children and mothers use their mobile phones to keep connected while mothers work.
4. Local / National – local organisations such as DARE working with schools to support children's use of mobiles / internet devices. Governments working closely with parents to support children's use of these devices through national policies, such as parental controls available with the purchase of devices.
5. Time – parents providing support for children's use of these devices now and for the future.

The framework *emerging freedom* could be used in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory when studying children's social development. As discussed, some children had the ability to move through his social settings more rapidly, opening up different opportunities at earlier points in their lives, compared to previous generations of middle years children. Parents were not always able to control the point at which children moved into these new social settings. By using the framework developed here, alongside Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, would help researchers develop a more informed understanding about children's social development. Further, it would allow Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory to have a more contemporary feel in relation to children's social development, which it lacks currently. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory does not include insights into how mobile / internet devices affect development within the social settings he describes, as they were not available when his theory was created.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, as the underpinning theory for this research, has been helpful and has supported the framework on *emerging freedom*. It has helped to illustrate that within his different social settings children's use of these devices can be supported by parents, as well as others, highlighting the meaning of those settings for children. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory however does not quite fit with the way children are currently socially interacting. So although his theory was helpful, it is limiting. However, if the two were to be combined, the framework on freedom and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, they may help to support each other when researchers are studying children's social development in a contemporary context, as the framework particularly illustrates the meaning of mobile / internet devices for children.

Children have the ability at their fingertips to engage within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) different social settings. Some of their communications may be fun, but others potentially risky. Parents supporting children with their communications is essential to prevent negative communications. This will help prevent unkind people from entering children's social worlds (social settings 1). With children's

use of these devices now such an essential part of their culture, Bronfenbrenner (1979) theory needs to accommodate the cyberworld that is so much part of children's communications. A different way to look at Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory is suggested here; to use the framework on children's *emerging freedom*, behavioural and social freedoms, alongside his theory (Figure 9.2), giving that theory a contemporary feel.

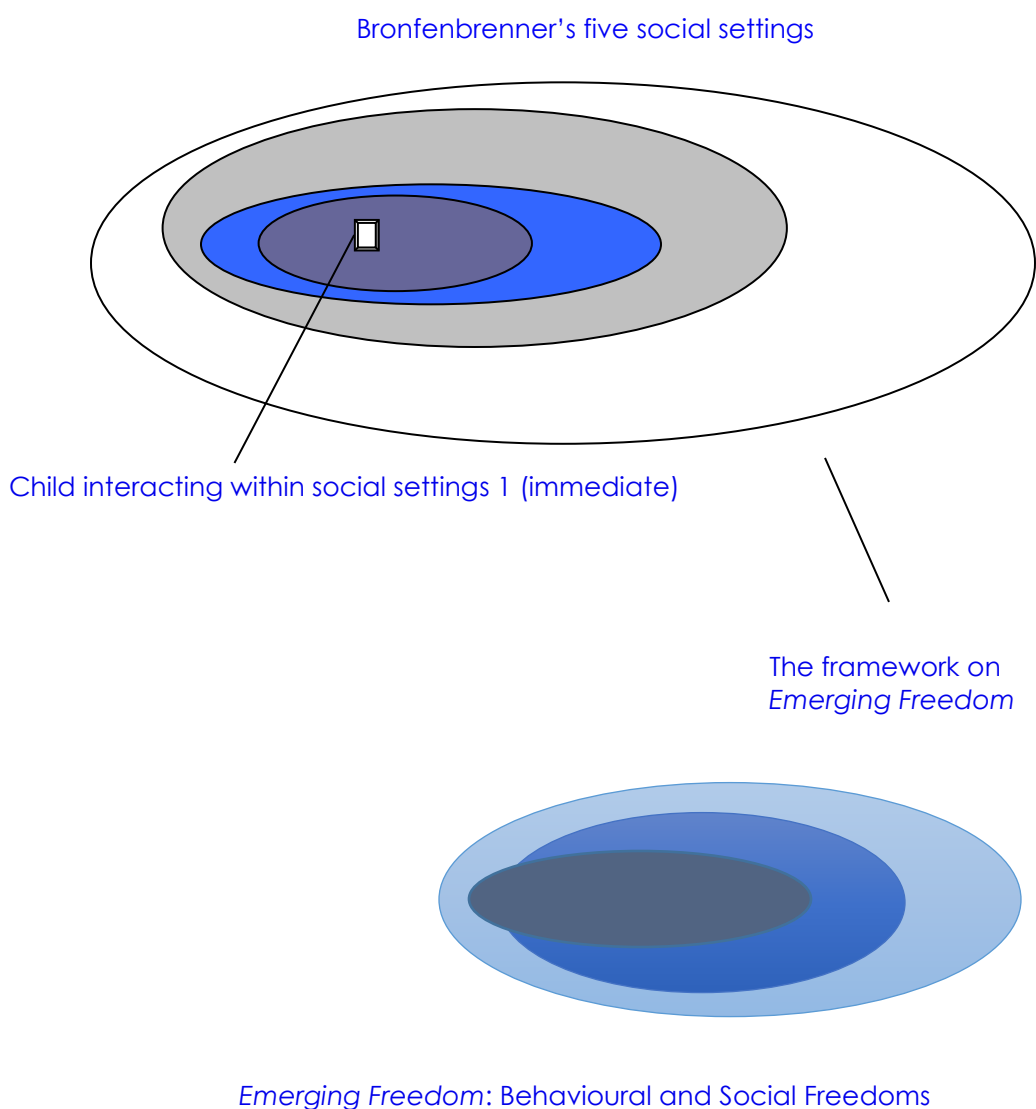


Figure 9.2. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings with the framework on children's *Emerging Freedom* included with the cyberworld.

As discussed there are several aspects of the findings which are unique. For example the framework on children's *emerging freedom* with its different phases of freedom, along with practical suggestions about how it could be adapted for use in practice (see sections 5.5, 6.5 and 7.4). Some unique findings have thus been developed for psychology. Further, the more recent development of an additional framework on *parenting approach - interaction between parenting and child development*, has been insightful. It highlights how different types of behaviour exhibited by children on their devices can potentially be influenced by parenting approach. These are latent ideas which will need further thought, but provide original evidence on parenting, and bring all the research findings together. This framework shows some similarities to Baumrind's (1966, 1973) ideas on parenting, but its focus is contemporary; children and their devices.

9.3 The value of themes and frameworks

The themes in this research illustrate how mobile / internet devices, in some situations from very early on during middle childhood, become incorporated within children's culture. Ling and Helmersen (2000) found the same with young people and their culture. Charlton et al. (2002) were the first to look at children's use of mobile phones and discussed links with freedom. While Haddon and Vincent (2014, 2015) highlighted that children felt they were more sociable because of their devices. These researchers illustrating greater social and behavioural freedoms for children / young people. Ling and Helmersen (2000), of all these researchers, comes closest to freedom and use of devices. They discussed freedom as developing in episodes associated with young people's use, similar to children and phases of freedom, as discussed here. Yet, they failed to explore these episodes in any detail; certainly not to the extent with which children's phases of freedom have been explored here. However, Ling's and Helmersen's (2000) theory would certainly provide a useful foundation for any further work that might be undertaken with young people and *emerging freedom*.

Ling and Helmersen (2000) suggest that freedom does not progress in one direction, with freedom always increasing; they suggest it can decrease too. Within the framework here it was evident too. This was most obvious when something went wrong with a child's behaviour, as it did for Greig and the *metaphorical leash* (section 6.2.2.1). Greig's phase of freedom was pulled back by his mother to a previous phase, following an incident where he failed to connect with home. *Emerging freedom* may not always increase for children; there may be a pause or step back to a previous phase, as a consequence of a particular incident occurring, similar to young people.

John Stuart Mill (1907), a philosopher who studied freedom, maintained that individuals are free to act. Children do not have the same power to act freely, as they are the responsibility of their parents (Children Act, 1989, 2004). There are frequently behavioural controls in place, which have the power to pull back their freedom at any point. The framework on freedom shows how these controls are mediated by parents and impact upon children's freedom. Even when children do reach the point where they are starting to achieve some freedoms, as described in the third subtheme *freedom – early beginnings*, this is not the end. As children become older further phases of freedom need to be negotiated and achieved in order to arrive at a point where the individual can describe themselves as an independent adult. Childhood and mobile / internet devices should be studied further to understand the characteristics associated with the different phases of freedom that lie beyond middle childhood, which Ling and Helmersen (2000) were beginning to explore.

Frameworks, similar to the one developed here on *emerging freedom*, are helpful for understanding behaviour. Woolgar (2009) argues that understandings about mobile phone / internet communications have progressed significantly, but there is little in the way of theoretical frameworks for making sense of it all. This is true with children's use of mobile phones, as it is a new behaviour. More recently Livingstone et al. (2012) have developed a framework for children's / young people's use of the internet as part of the EU Kids Online project. The

primary focus of this framework includes risks and opportunities related to their use of the internet. Further, it includes various social forms of mediation – socioeconomic, technical infrastructure, education, and cultural values. A very useful framework which fits well with the social psychology perspective they have taken with their research. The framework on freedom developed here takes a different focus. It is concerned with middle childhood and parenting, primarily focusing on the mobile phone. The age group is essentially younger. Livingstone et al.'s (2012) framework looks at many different issues. The framework on freedom here focuses on children's social interactions and behaviour, and how children gradually develop freedom. It takes a child development perspective. Both frameworks offer something different in understanding children and their communications on mobile / internet devices at this time (early 21st Century).

Woolgar (2009) maintains that publications about the internet are organized around familiar theoretical themes which occupy the social sciences – politics, communities and crime, for example. He suggests that researchers are trying to fit new knowledge into established theoretical frameworks. As observed with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, recognized frameworks can help, but only to a limited extent. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory does not entirely accommodate children's contemporary ways of communicating. Therefore as Woolgar (2009) suggests, new frameworks need to be created as developed here, which will help to accommodate original knowledge discovered about children's mobile / internet behaviours.

9.4 Conclusions

Chapter 9 has discussed the original nature of this research; how the themes work together creating a framework on freedom that psychologists can use when studying middle childhood. The framework on *emerging freedom* provides structure and insights into children's social development on their devices. The

framework could be used on its own or in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory on social development. Using it in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory would help to illustrate parents' role within children's communications on their devices; supporting children within his social settings. Chapter 10 brings the research to a close.

Chapter 10: Research Conclusions and Recommendations

Studying children's social development at this point in time, during the early part of the 21st Century, is an interesting time to be doing so. Children (7 – 12 years) are now finding new ways of communicating with each other, just as young people / young adults did before them. For some children mobile / internet communications are becoming really important. This is the first generation of middle years children to grow up using these devices in the UK. It was important therefore to find out what these devices meant to this special cohort, and how devices were impacting upon their communications and behaviours.

For this cohort their position has changed since this research first began in 2009; representing an age group who received minimal attention, to now being a group of children who are viewed with interest by researchers. This is an appropriate time therefore to be discussing the findings of this research in the interests of middle years children. Chapter 10 will present the conclusions and recommendations developed from this research. This chapter particularly considers where further research may lead.

10.1: Research Summary and Conclusions

During 2009, when this research first began, middle years children were just starting to use mobile phones. They already knew how to use the internet, which was being incorporated into mobile phones in the form of smartphones. Children wanted to be part of this new development. As a parent of a middle years child, I wanted to know about their behaviours with mobile phones, and what role parents played. Parents already had concerns about children's use of the internet (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008), so what would this mean for children

using mobile phones at a young age. Just prior to children embracing the mobile phone Haddon (2007) predicted that parents would be concerned. Mobile phones were easily accessible, parents would worry about children's access.

At the start of this research high quality literature was becoming available on children's internet use through the EU Kids Online project (see Livingstone et al., 2012). However, literature was limited on their mobile phone use. Although just prior to the completion of this research literature became available on children's / young people's use of the mobile phone through the Net Children go Mobile project (see Haddon & Vincent, 2014, 2015 for example).

In 2009 this research into children's (7 – 12 years) views and parents' views about children's use of mobile / internet devices began. The purpose, to gain insights into children's behaviours with these devices. It was important to ask children themselves, so that they had a voice within the research; they knew best what these devices meant to them. The research was developed in response to the questions -

Research question 1:

What do mobile / internet devices mean to children (7 – 12 years) within their lives, as described by children themselves?

Research question 2:

What are parents' views about their role within children's use of mobile / internet devices?

A qualitative methodology was applied to achieve in-depth insights into participants' views, explored through focus groups and interviews. Young people's views and literature from within their field, were also examined to further enhance a developing understanding of children's behaviours and communications on their devices. Young people, as an age group, had been

using mobile phones for some time and therefore had expertise to offer the research.

The research questions and aims (section 3.2.1) were achieved through this investigation of participants' views. Addressing the first research question (meaning for children) and its associated aims (i, ii, iii), particularly about children's positive and negative communications and links with identity, findings were revealed about children's social development. Children were usually 9 / 10 years old when they first acquired a mobile phone. For participating children their devices meant freedom; behavioural and social freedoms. They could play out with their friends, knowing that they could maintain a close connection with home. Children's attempts at developing freedom were demonstrated in different phases as they moved through middle childhood, which came to be referred to as *emerging freedom*. Social settings 1 (immediate environments, Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was demonstrated within each phase of freedom. In comparison with young people, children's behavioural freedoms were sometimes the same, sometimes different. Generally, towards the end of middle childhood their behaviours were becoming more similar to young people; experiencing more freedom assisted by the mobile phone. However, when younger, they experienced less freedom with more behavioural controls in place. Children's social freedoms compared to young people's freedoms again varied; sometimes they would communicate in a cool fashionable way on their devices, similar to young people. Other times they would simply communicate with each other for fun; being polite and repeatedly replying to one another to keep their conversations going. Young people held a more ambivalent view about communication; for them the mobile phone had lost some of its magic and had become more of a practical tool.

Comparing children with young people, there were differences in how they used their devices when they first started to use them. Children with parental support would use them safely and appropriately, avoiding some of the mistakes that young people had made in the past. For example Plant (2000) demonstrated

how inconsiderate European teens had been with use of their devices in public. Children in this research however were more aware and considerate, illustrating potentially a positive effect of parental support. The research concludes that participating children were growing up more aware of the importance in considering those around them when using mobiles than some young people had been. With support from parents some children can achieve this.

Participating children's communications on their devices were polite. Negative communications generally seemed to be associated with communications they received from others. Children were confidently able to handle these, drawing on advice and skills learnt from home and school (Bronfenbrenner's, 1979, social settings 2). Children needed as much evidence as they could to interpret their communications appropriately, which visual and auditory cues provided. Where these cues were lacking, children sometimes would find it more difficult to interpret their communications, particularly those which required more thought and sensitivity. The research here concludes that communication cues are important to children's mobile / internet communications, as they are still learning about communication.

These findings about children's communications on their mobile phones are noteworthy, particularly as little was known at the start of this research about their positive communications. Frequently, negative aspects are stressed by research, but more recently research by Vincent (2015) has discussed the positive nature of children's communications. Similar to the research here, which has shown how many of children's communications on their mobile phones can be positive. Research is now beginning to realise that although children might be young when they first start to use mobile phones, they can still learn how to communicate on them appropriately.

An important aim (aim iii) was to investigate children's use of these devices separately from young people's use. Initially, because using the mobile phone was a new behaviour for children and by studying them as a separate group a

more informed understanding would be achieved about their development. Also, because some researchers study children and young people together, which sometimes makes it difficult to determine what is relevant to children. Middle years children are younger than young people; their needs and behaviours are sometimes different. This was particularly evident when the research looked at cyberbullying. Bullying is a problem commonly associated with the teenage years (Smith et al., 2006), and perhaps the same can be said about cyberbullying. Participating children generally did not find cyberbullying a problem, unlike young people. Obviously, more research will need to be undertaken to fully understand this finding, but it is important evidence on children and cyberbullying. The research here concludes that cyberbullying, similar to bullying, may not be as significant during middle childhood as it is during the teenage years.

Giving children a voice, an aim of the research (aim ii), was achieved. Children's views were confident and varied. On reflection, some children seemed so in control of their devices; or at least they appeared to be when they talked about them. At the time I wondered if they were simply trying to impress me as the researcher into thinking that they were very capable and confident, particularly the boys. Sometimes children like to appear more confident than perhaps they are, which Ofcom (2012a) found in their research. However, when children's various accounts were read and analyzed, they did indeed seem to know what they were talking about. These children had absorbed the information they had been given by parents and school on how to use their devices safely. This evidence again shows that with support, middle years children can become skilled and confident users.

Addressing the second research question (parents' role) and its associated aims (iv and v), particularly about approach to parenting and mediation strategies, *time* was an important factor for participating parents. Through the application of *time*, parents were able to understand the importance of mobile / internet devices for children's social development. For example, thinking about the

future enabled parents to understand the significance of devices within their children's lives today. By providing support for their children now, parents felt they were able to help their children's future lives. Providing support was extremely important to participating parents. *Time* links with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 5, where he considers development of the family group across time. The approach of many parents was one of support. Although there were others who adopted more of a controlling approach.

For participating parents mobile phones were an important resource for parenting. As a resource the mobile helped with family co-ordination. Mothers were able to provide support for their children whilst apart, which demonstrated Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social settings 3, environments that the child is not in influencing child development, such as a mother's employment. This has also been found within European studies (see Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004; Geser, 2006). Some parents might however overuse the resource, which potentially carried risks for children's development. Children might become over reliant on their parents. For these children the mobile phone became the *parent in their pocket*, always available. This was at risk of occurring in families where parents were particularly controlling. Parents would overly mediate their children's behaviour, rather than be supportive and negotiate. Research now advocates support and negotiation as a more appropriate approach for parent mediation and children's devices, rather than control (Tipp, 2011; Haddon, 2013; Valkenburg et al., 2013; Mascheroni, 2014). The research here concludes that health promotion strategies could be introduced by psychologists to help raise parents' awareness of the risks associated with being too controlling, and the importance of adopting a more supportive approach when parenting children's devices.

Important findings have thus been revealed through this research about the role of parents with children's mobile / internet devices, and how they use them to support their children, or sometimes try to control them. As previously discussed, there has been limited information available about the mobile phone and its role

within parenting, specifically for middle years children here in the UK. The evidence here is showing similarities to that found with young people (Tripp, 2010; Haddon, 2013, 2015) and middle years children in Europe (Mascheroni, 2014). Parents can be supportive, but there are some parents who can be controlling, which thus leads to restrictions in children's behaviour. The framework on *parenting approach - interaction of parenting with child development* illustrates this (Figure 7.2).

More can be understood about this finding by considering the underlying social processes within interactions between children and parents. Sometimes this showed that parents had concerns about children's use of devices because they were young and were just starting to use them; characteristics associated with the special nature of this cohort (aim v). Parents were unsure how using these devices at such a young age would impact upon children's social interactions. Parents also had concerns linked to children's freedoms. For example feelings about the local community that it was not safe, which might result in limiting children's freedom. Due to these different concerns parents felt the need to be controlling; overly controlling sometimes. Strict mediation strategies were thus employed, rather than adopting strategies with support and negotiation as the focus. These parents needed to maintain their control. Children using mobile / internet devices might threaten their control. So to prevent this some children were only allowed limited access to their devices. Conversely, parents could also maintain their control by giving children a mobile phone, and use it frequently themselves to monitor children's behaviour. The research concludes that neither approach helps children to develop confident independent behaviours with their devices.

10.1.1 Key points

Overall, some of the findings developed are similar to studies that have looked at children's and young people's use of the internet, for example Livingstone et al. (2012).

Similar findings include:

- Children have a strong desire to communicate on mobile / internet devices;
- Parents thought that mobile / internet devices offered their children opportunities, but they were also concerned about their children's using them;
- Parents' role was one of mediation, with some parents including support and negotiation as a strategy. This is just beginning to be discussed within other research in the area.

There are other findings too that are new and different, which other researchers may find interesting.

- Participating children's communications on mobile / internet devices were normally polite.
- Cool communications – towards the end of middle childhood some children were enjoying similar communication experiences to young people; cool devices with the cool use of language.
- Cyberbullying was not a significant issue during middle childhood for this group of children.

- Use of mobile / internet devices for most of these children demonstrated how they were able to develop freedom, both socially and behaviourally.
- The concept of *time* was able to give context to parents as they attempted to understand their children's social development with these devices.
- The mobile phone can be a useful resource for parents, allowing them to support children's development. But potentially if overused by parents can cause difficulties for children's development, which has also been found with young people.

It is hoped that these findings will help to take knowledge forward within psychology, particularly in the UK, which first began with Charlton et al.'s (2002) study on children's use of mobile phones.

10.2 Recommendations

There are a number of important recommendations that have arisen from this research, as the following outlines.

- **Positive communications**

Psychologists are just beginning to understand the positive aspects to children's communications on mobile phones. More research is needed to increase psychologists' understanding in this area.

- **Communication cues**

Studying middle childhood, their interactions with mobile / internet devices, highlights the importance of communication cues; visual and auditory.

Research should be undertaken to understand more fully the value of these cues within children's communications on their devices.

- [Cyberbullying](#)

Cyberbullying may not be a significant problem for children on mobile / internet devices. It may be more commonly associated with the teenage years, similar to bullying. Children do sometimes receive negative messages, but they are not generally of a cyberbullying nature. It might be more useful to refer to such communications as *harassing* messages rather than depicting them as cyberbullying, which is a much more serious issue.

- [Support for parents](#)

Continued support for parents with children's use of mobile / internet devices would be valuable, particularly as this is becoming such an important part of the parenting role, not just within middle childhood, but throughout childhood. Some parents within this research expressed a need for support. Further, it might prevent problems arising for children's development, with parents overusing the mobile phone with their child.

- [Health promotion for children and parents to address risks of overuse](#)

The impact of some parents overusing the mobile phone in an attempt to support and mediate their children's behaviour, could potentially lead to children becoming over-dependent upon their parents, as discussed within chapter 7. The parent is always available, almost like *a parent in their pocket*, ready to respond. Health promotion strategies that help both children and parents to be aware of the risks, could be introduced, in an effort to encourage children's independence. This is an important recommendation for child psychology, particularly as recent evidence suggests that the reality for some

children / young people is a restricted childhood (Brooks, 2006; Gill, 2012; Boyd, 2014), and not *emerging freedom*.

- Health promotion for parents to address their concerns

Some parents had concerns about their children using devices. Young people / young adults were able to provide details about their own experiences with devices and how their use had changed over time. Parents may find such information helpful, particularly in relation to their children's future use of these devices. Health promotion sessions that provide parents with the opportunity to talk with young people / young adults might help ease some of their concerns. Parents then might be reassured that with appropriate support children can successfully incorporate these devices within their lives.

- Further research with middle years children

Further research should be undertaken with middle years children, but with different characteristics to this cohort, particularly with regard to the supportiveness from their parents. It would be important to see how evidence compares with the framework on *emerging freedom*. A less positive analysis of children and mobile phones might be depicted, due to a lack of support from parents. Many children in the research here were competent users of their devices, which was influenced by parents and school working together to support them.

- Research with young people

Theoretically, to provide broader knowledge for the framework on *emerging freedom*, it would be important to explore the characteristics associated with the next phases of freedom. To undertake research with young people and observe how freedom emerges for them through their use of devices. Additional phases of freedom may thus be revealed. Although much has been learnt by studying

this cohort of children, it feels that this is only the beginning. More evidence may be discovered by studying young people, as Ling and Helmersen (2000) did with their episodes of freedom. The cohort who participated in this research are now young people themselves. To discuss with them how their use of devices has changed since they first presented their initial views as children, would be a useful starting point. It may provide further insights into how freedom changes.

- [Research with younger children](#)

The youngest children to participate were 7 / 8 year olds, and only minimal insights were gained about their views. To interview children of this age and get closer to their views, particularly as this age group are now becoming more involved with their devices (Ofcom, 2013) might be helpful. Care would need to be taken with research techniques used, paying particular attention to how information is explained to them. Using pictures and toys within interviews would help to make talking easier for them. Recently research has been undertaken by Holloway, Green and Livingstone (2013) specifically researching under eights and their use of the internet.

- [The framework – *Emerging Freedom: Behavioural and Social Freedoms*](#)

Importantly, the framework developed from children's and parents' views about children's use of devices has provided theoretical evidence on children's social development in relation to freedom. It adds to psychological knowledge about children's social development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory was helpful in demonstrating how support can be provided for children within the different social settings he describes. However, his theory lacks a contemporary perspective, particularly in relation to the way children's communications are currently developing. The framework on freedom could be used alongside Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory to help provide a contemporary perspective on children's social development. On a practical level the framework could be

used as a resource by psychologists to help them assess children's behaviours with their devices.

- Children's voice

Middle years children can successfully provide their views within research if given the opportunity, as demonstrated here, with careful thought being given to the management of this process (Moyse, 2015a). Other researchers may want to consider asking children and not just their parents, when undertaking child development research.

- *The framework on parenting approach - interaction of parenting with child development.*

A recent development, the framework on *parenting approach* which demonstrates the interaction of parenting with child development, will need further thought. Initially it shows some promising ideas as a theoretical framework for understanding parent and child interactions with their devices.

These recommendations are practical, theoretical, educational, methodological, and contain ideas for further research. The purpose in undertaking this research was to find out information that would help support children and parents, as well as other psychologists. The recommendations outlined here contain ideas which they may find useful, as children's use of these devices continues. These ideas are beginning to be shared with other psychologists (Moyse, 2015b).

In summary at the beginning of this thesis I put forward a case (chapter 1) on why there was a need to undertake research with children and parents to explore the meaning of mobile phones within children's lives at this time. Research questions were devised, which the thesis has explored through the views from one group of children and parents. In addressing the research

questions, not only has the meaning of these devices been explored, but original frameworks have been created for children and parents. As Woolgar (2009) states there are few frameworks that enable researchers to understand individuals' use of mobile / internet devices, which is particularly true for children. Here, the development of a framework on children's *emerging freedom* particularly provides an understanding on what is unique about children's mobile phone behaviours currently, certainly for one cohort of middle years children.

Yet, what of my initial concerns outlined in chapter 1, about being a parent of a child who is now very involved in her devices? With securities in place and safety skills learnt by her and supported by me, I still have concerns, but I can see the opportunities too. I am just like any other parent. Nonetheless, I am learning to understand about the role of a mobile phone in the emergence of her freedom, especially now that she is a young person.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Headmaster's letter

Appendix 2: Children's interviews – participant information

Appendix 1: Headmaster's letter

FROM THE HEADMASTER

Professor x
Department of Psychology
University of Lincoln
Brayford Pool
Lincoln
LN6 7TS

27th March 2009

Dear x,

I am pleased to have been approached to support Karen Moyse's proposed Ph.D. research, provisionally titled "**Parents' perceptions on parenting their children's use of mobile phones and e-communications, in the 21st Century.**"

My understanding is that this will be an exploration of parents' views on parenting in relation to their children's use of mobile phones and e-communications. As part of this research Karen will also be exploring children's perspectives on this issue.

I am happy for Karen, in continued consultation with me, to undertake a survey with parents, along with a children's focus group, at two different time intervals, at Highfields School. I understand that issues relating to confidentiality will be observed and addressed as appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

Headmaster.

Appendix 2: Children's interviews – participant information

Karen Moyse, Researcher, School of Psychology, Faculty of Health, Life and Social Science, University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln, LN6 7TS



Date

Dear Parent (named)

**Re: Parents' and Children's views on children's use of
mobile phones and the internet.
A research project**

In the Psychology Department at the University of Lincoln we are researching children's use of mobile phones and the internet, along with parents' involvement. We are planning to interview children and parents over the coming months. We are looking for volunteers who would be happy to take part in a short interview, and wondered if your family would be interested in participating.

Your family's contribution will simply involve Mum or Dad, along with son or daughter, participating in an interview. To participate, children need to be between the ages of 7 – 12 years. If you are willing for your son or daughter, and yourself, to take part in this interview, please contact Karen Moyse, who is the researcher leading the project. Karen can be contacted on x. A leaflet enclosed provides further details about the project, which if you are interested, please read together with your child. There is also a personal invitation for your child.

Please note Karen has been given CRB clearance for this project. Thank you for your interest.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Moyse,
Researcher, University of Lincoln.



Children's Invitation



Mobile phones and the internet

What do children think?

How do you use them?

What do you think you will be doing with them in the future?

Dear x

Would you like to take part in an interview (chat) about mobile phones and the internet? If you would then Karen (x's mum), would like to talk to you about how you use them. Thank you, *Karen*



Parents and Children's Information Leaflet (A5 leaflet)



Parents' and Children's views on children's use of mobile phones and the internet...

A research project

Introduction

In the Psychology Department at the University of Lincoln we are interested in finding out how children (7 - 12 years of age) use their mobile phones and the internet. We are also interested to know what role parents play in this process. We would like to invite children and their parents to take part in a short interview, as part of this research project.

What is the purpose of the research project?

The reason why we are interested in researching this project is so that we can help support parents and children. Children often want help when they first start to learn how to use their mobile phones and the internet, and parents can play a key role. Eventually, the information we find out will be used to develop information leaflets for parents and children. We will also publish some of this information in journals and at conferences, so people know what we have discovered.

What will the interview involve?

Children need to be between 7 - 12 years to take part. Children can be interviewed individually, or if they prefer, children can be interviewed with their Mum or Dad. The interview will involve a few short questions about how children use their mobile phones and the internet for communication, along with what parents think about children's use. There are no right or wrong answers, children and parents

simply say what they think and believe. The interview can be undertaken at home, at a time to suit you all, or children may prefer to be interviewed at school. Each interview will last about 30 - 40 minutes.



Who will we meet?

Karen Moyse is the researcher leading this project and she is working with Professor x, Head of Psychology at the University of Lincoln. Karen will be undertaking the interviews. She has experience of working with children and parents as a Children's Nurse and also has interview experience. Both Harriet and Karen write about children's health and development.

What about our privacy?

The information you both provide will be anonymous; no real names are used, and no specific locations are identified. With your consent, we would like to tape record the interview. The recording is then written up into a document called a transcript. All tapes and written transcripts are stored securely.

Can we see the results of our contribution?

You will both be able to see your written transcript and comment about any changes that you feel might need to be made, if you request to see it. At the end of the project a summary of the findings will be available.

What next?

If you are interested in taking part, please contact Karen on x, who will be happy to provide further information.

Contact details provided

Thank you both for reading this leaflet.

Karen Moyse, Researcher

**Parents' and Children's views on children's use of
Mobile phones and the internet...
A research project**

Interview briefing sheet and Consent form...

Karen has given you details about the project, which include why the project is being undertaken and what an interview will involve. If you are interested in taking part, please take time to read the following points. They provide further information about the interview. Once you have read these points and feel that you would like to take part in an interview, please sign the consent form included overleaf.

- ✚ We understand what this project is about.
- ✚ During the interview we understand that Karen would like to ask us some questions about children using mobile phones and the internet.
- ✚ We are aware that Karen would like to tape record the interview, but we can request that no tape recording is made.
- ✚ If we request it, we can take a break during the interview.
- ✚ We are also aware that either one of us can stop the interview at any time.
Traffic light cards are available for children to help with this -
 - Red - stop
 - Yellow - not sure
 - Green - go, ready to start again
- ✚ To protect our identities, our real names will not be used in this project.

- ✚ Information from the interview will be typed into a transcript, which will be available for us to check, if we request it.
- ✚ We have been informed that the outcomes of this project are likely to be published in journals and at conferences.
- ✚ We are aware that we can comment on any part of the project process. This can be done either through Karen, the researcher, or by contacting Professor x at the University of Lincoln.
- ✚ We can withdraw from the project at any time.

If you have any questions about any of the above points or simply have queries about the project itself, please ask Karen, who will be happy to help.

Consent form...

Child's consent

Participant code: 12

I have read the above information with my Mum and would like to take part in an interview.

Sign.....Date.....

Parent consent for child

I have read the above information and I give permission for my child (named above) to participate in an interview.

Sign.....Date.....

Parent consent

Participant code: 12

I have read the above information and I would like to participate in an interview.

Sign.....Date.....

Thank you

Karen Moyse, Researcher